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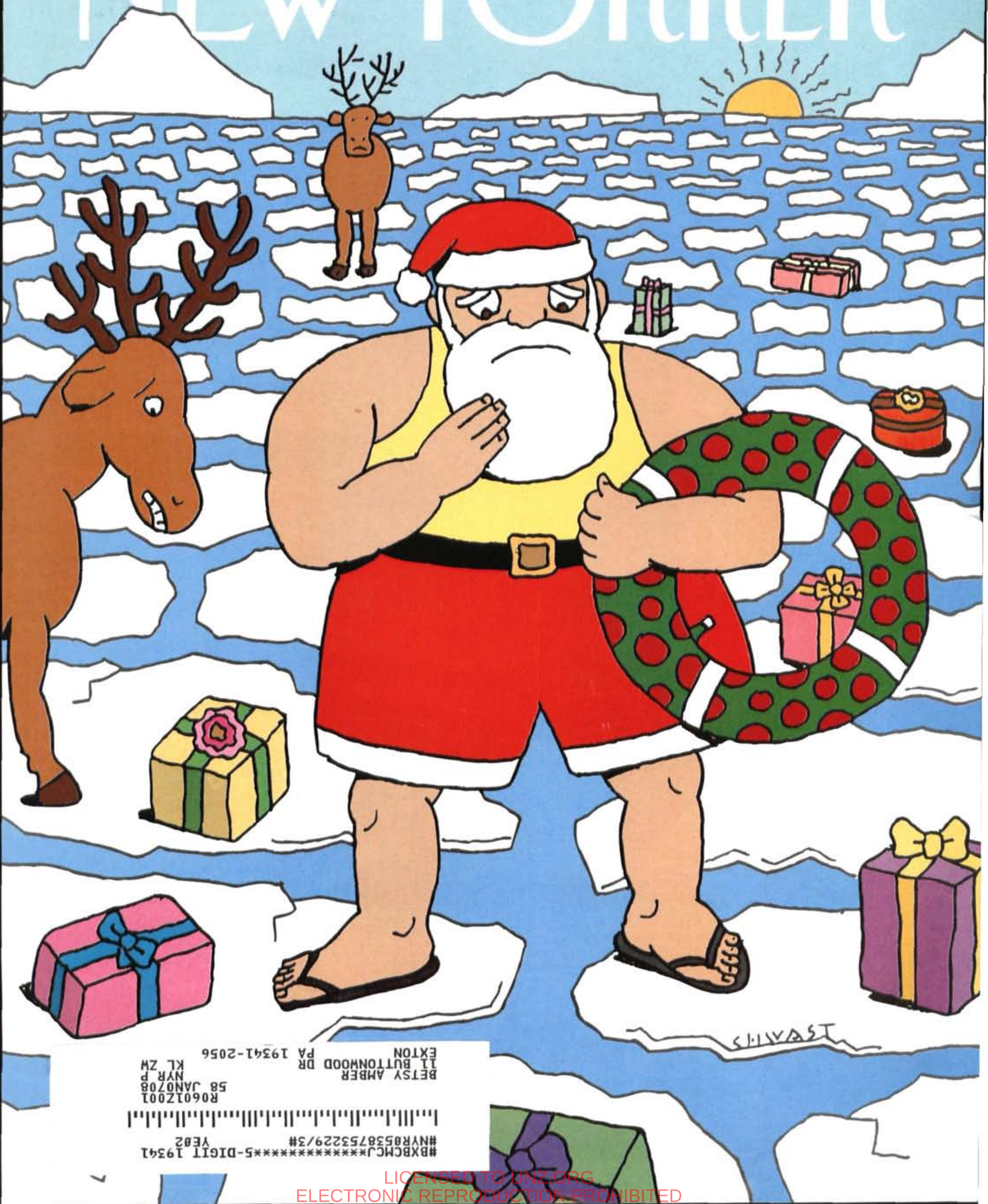
THE NEW YORKER

DEC. 12, 2005



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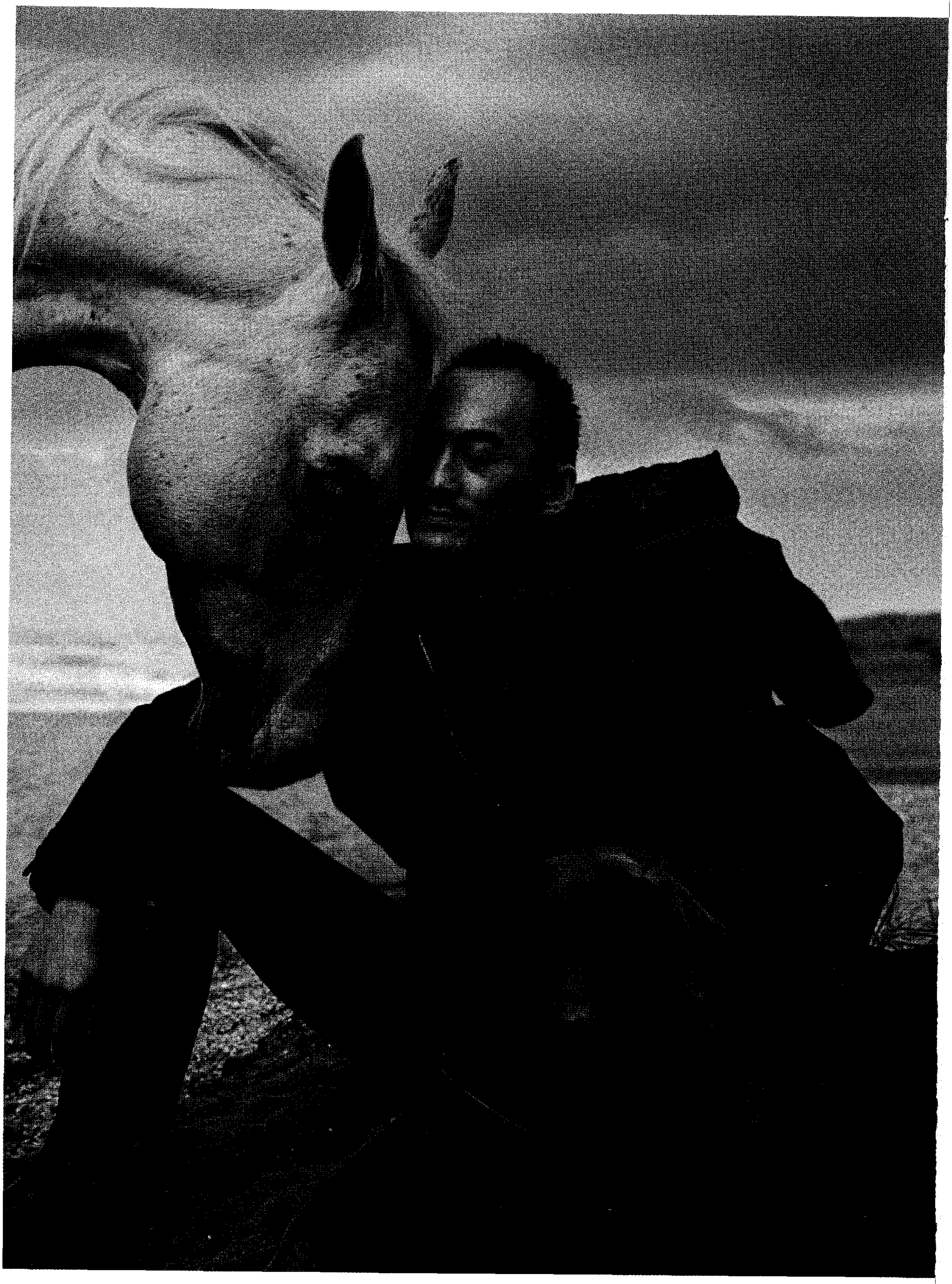

My name Ken Watanabe

childhood ambition Trumpet player

fondest memory I have too many good memories to remember just one

soundtrack Warm & Cool jazz

retreat My home

wildest dream I would have had an answer to this question 10 years ago, but now is to find happiness in my everyday life

proudest moment When I gain trust from someone

biggest challenge Life

alarm clock My child's voice

perfect day searching for something I cannot reach

first job dog walker, and cleaning the stairs of my home

indulgence reading adventure novels

last purchase Ski wear and ski hat

favorite movie Too many to just chose one

inspiration I am inspired by so many things every day

My life is about taking my own path

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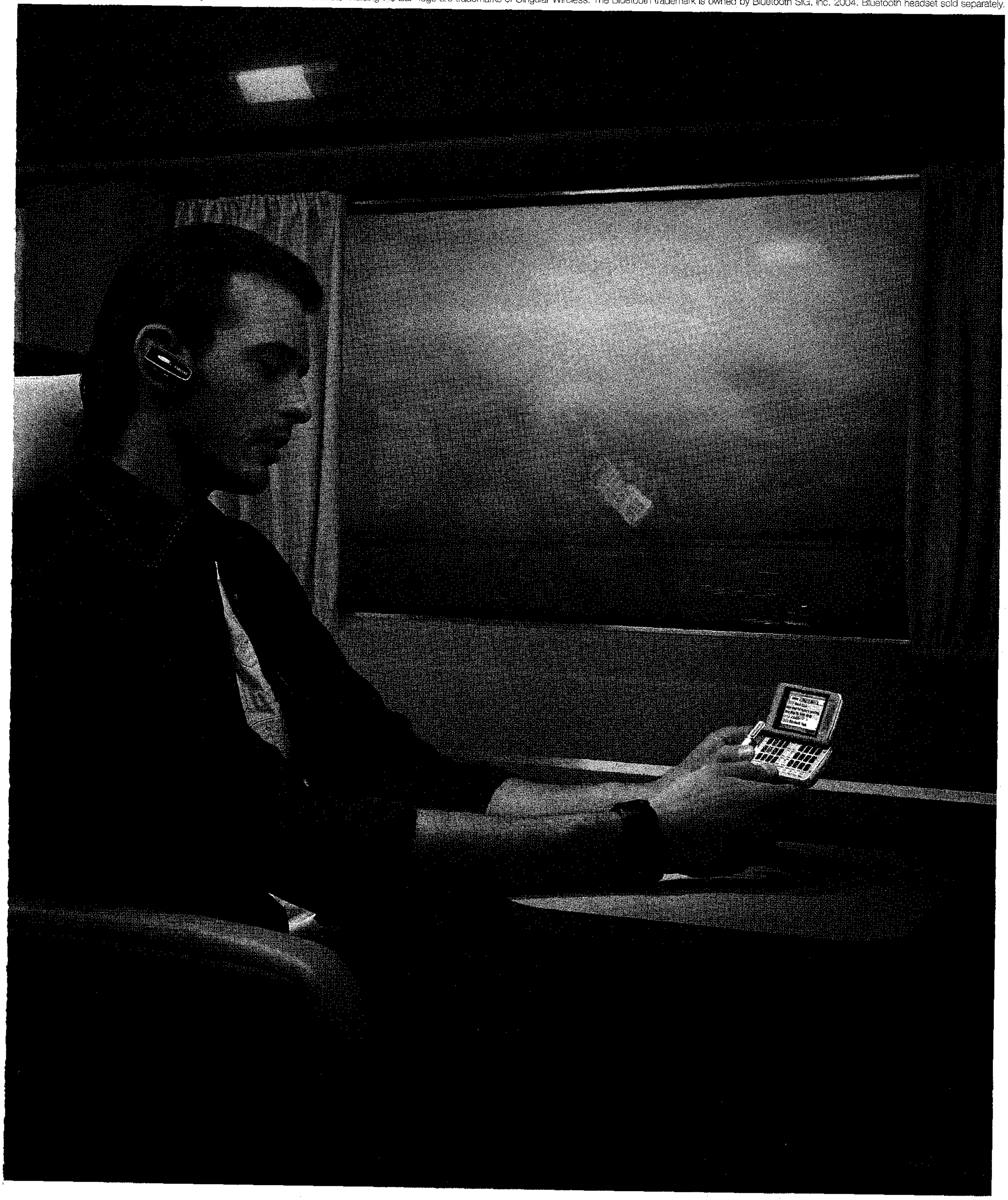

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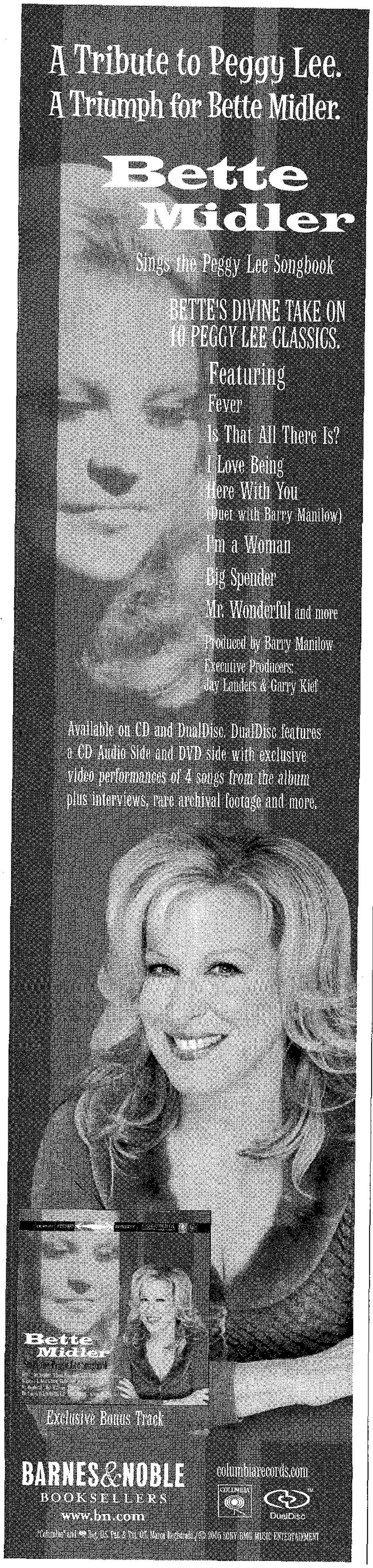
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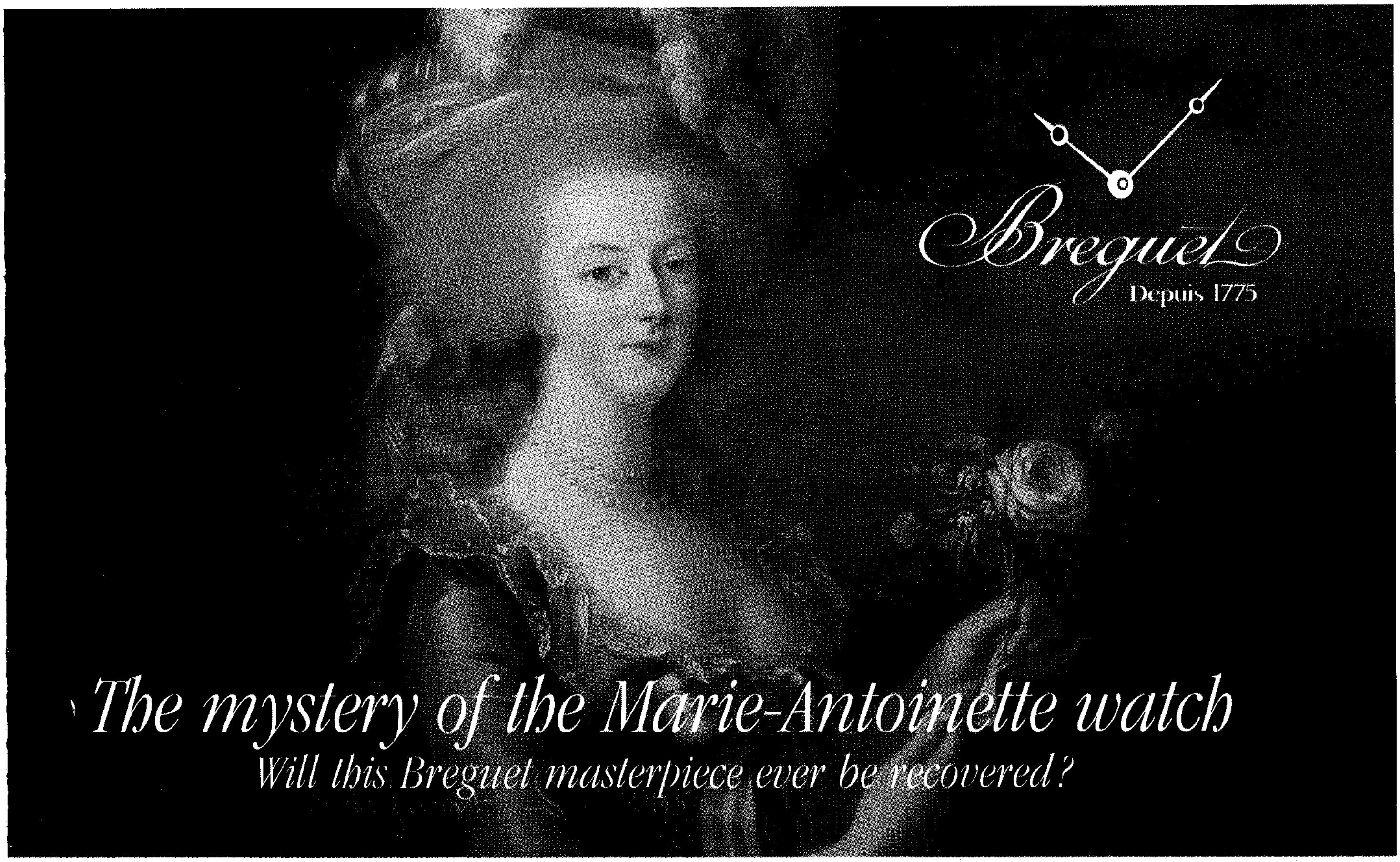


The mystery of the Marie-Antoinette watch

Will this Breguet masterpiece ever be recovered?

Queen Marie-Antoinette's passion for Breguet watches is legendary. She was a trendsetter, and if she wore a Breguet, everyone who aspired to "à la mode" status did too.

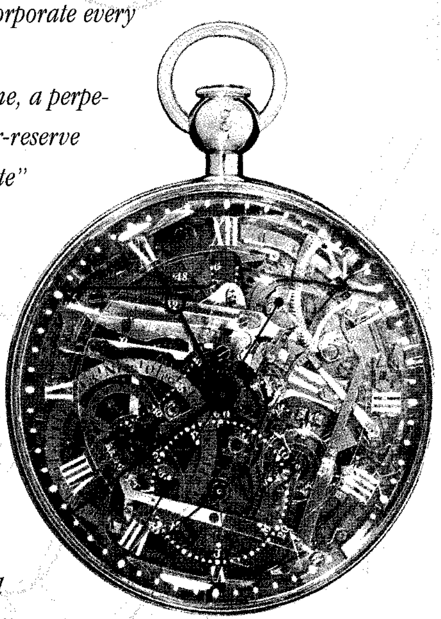
In 1783, Breguet was asked to make a watch as a gift for the queen, most probably by a secret lover. It had to be the most complicated watch of its time and incorporate every complication then known. Money was no object.

The result was a marvel of complexity, featuring the equation of time, a perpetual calendar, a repeater, a thermometer, a chronograph and a power-reserve indicator. It was fitted with a special lever escapement while "pare-chute" devices protected the balance staff and the winding-weight arbors.

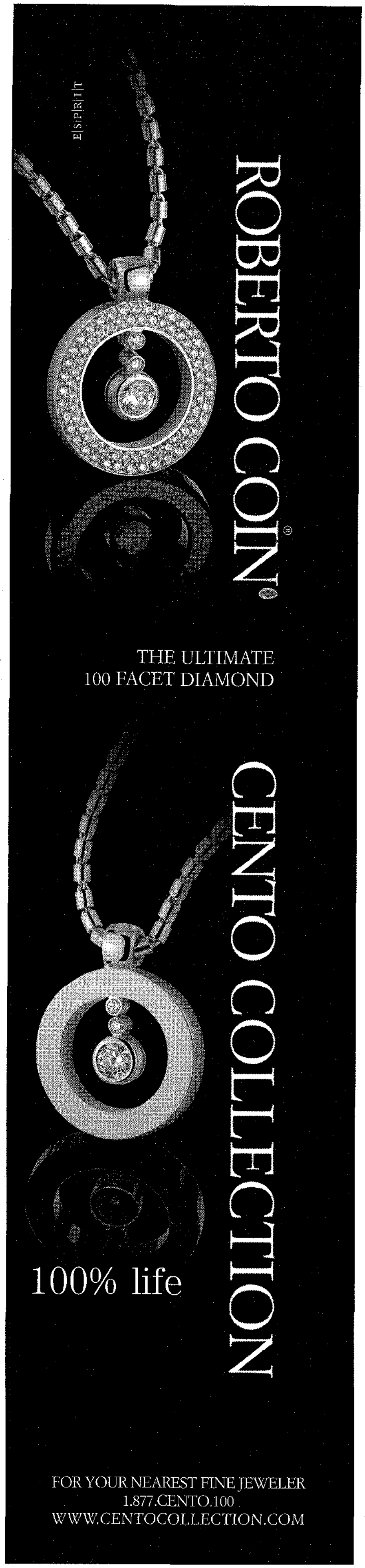
Unfortunately Marie-Antoinette never laid eyes on the watch. It was finished in 1827, 44 years after it was ordered and 34 years after the queen had died.

The fate of Breguet's famed Marie-Antoinette watch has sparked speculation galore. In 1983, thieves stole the watch from a museum in Jerusalem and it was never seen again.

But now Nicolas G. Hayek, CEO of Montres Breguet S.A., has challenged the company's master watchmakers and expert craftsmen to build an exact reproduction of the Marie-Antoinette. They accepted with relish, discovering to their surprise that the watch had not yielded all its secrets, not least that it actually possessed jumping hours.



Montres Breguet SA, 1344 L'Abbaye (Vallée de Joux), Switzerland, tel. +41 21 841 90 90 - www.breguet.com



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CONTRIBUTORS

Steve Coll ("Young Osama," p. 48) received this year's Pulitzer Prize in nonfiction, for "Ghost Wars," his book about the C.I.A. and Afghanistan.

Elizabeth Kolbert (Comment, p. 39) has a book about global warming, "Field Notes from a Catastrophe," coming out in March.

Ben McGrath (The Talk of the Town, p. 42) is a staff writer.

James Surowiecki (The Financial Page, p. 46) writes about business and finance. His book "The Wisdom of Crowds" is available in paperback.

Tom Mueller ("Your Move," p. 62) is a freelance writer who lives in Italy.

Seymour Chwast (Cover; Illustrations, pp. 26, 94) will have a show of his paintings at the Maya Stendhal Gallery, in New York, in May.

Ian Frazier ("Hogs Wild," p. 70) has been a contributor since 1974. "Gone to New York," a book of his essays about the city, was published last month.

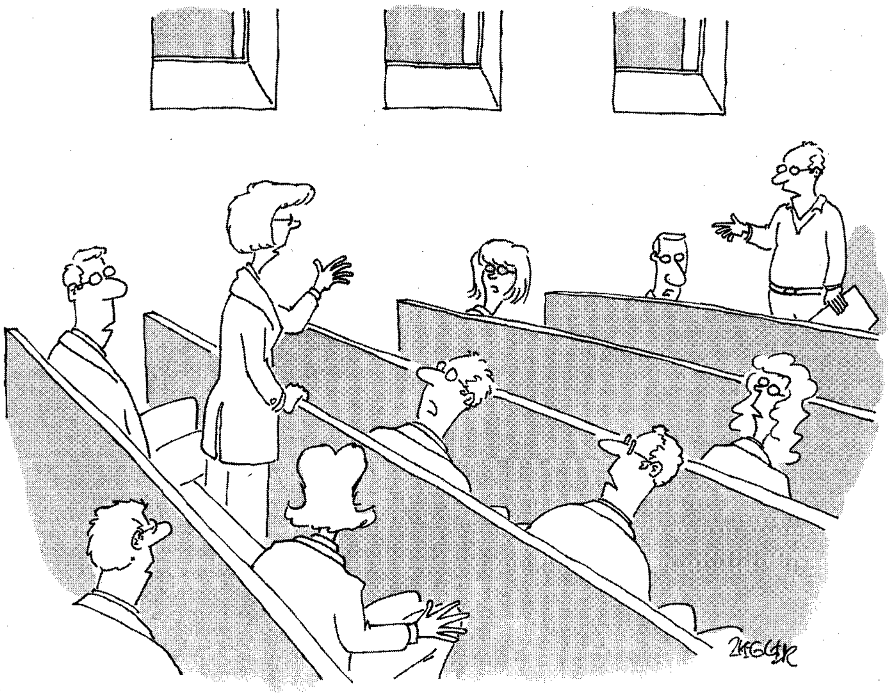
Walton Ford (Painting, p. 70) will have an exhibit of his work at the Brooklyn Museum next fall.

Grace Paley (Poem, p. 64) is a writer and a poet. Her "Collected Stories" will be reissued in June.

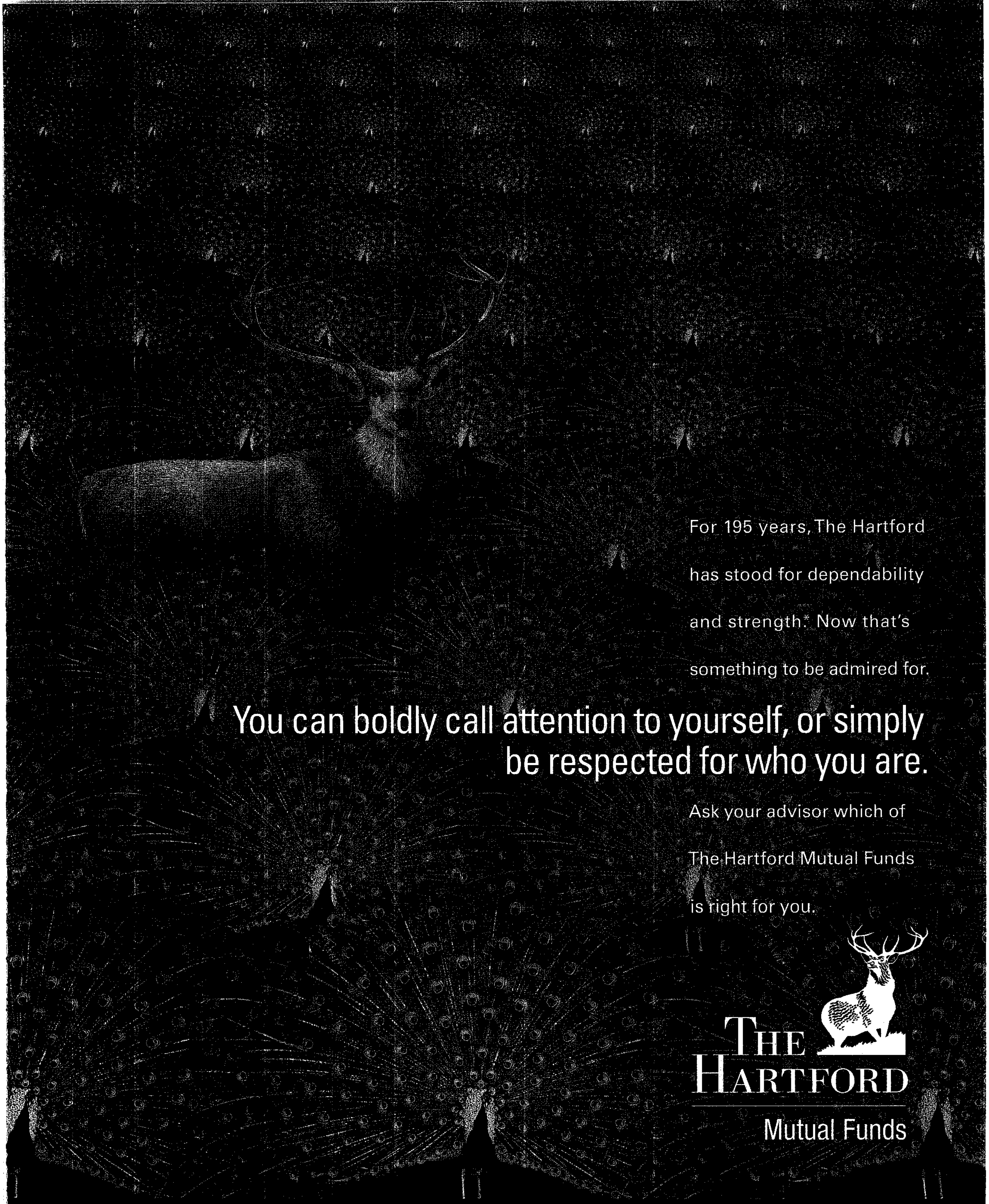
Sue Halpern ("The Gene Hunters," p. 84) is the author of four books, including "Introducing... Sasha Abramowitz," which was published in October.

T. Coraghessan Boyle (Fiction, p. 94) published his seventh short-story collection, "Tooth and Claw," in September.

Claudia Roth Pierpont (Books, p. 102) is the author of "Passionate Minds," a collection of essays about women writers. ♦



"Hi, everybody. My name is Jane, and I, too, voted for the present Administration." "Hi, Jane."



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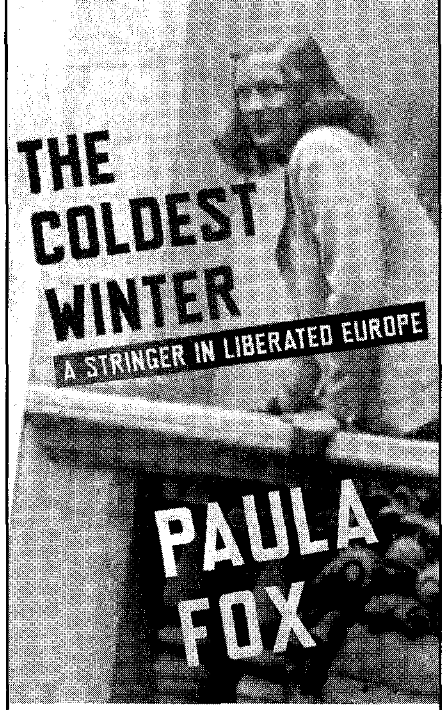
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—Michiko Kakutani, *The New York Times*

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HEMINGWAY IN SPAIN

As the author of three books on Ernest Hemingway, one of them alluded to in George Packer's review, I was dismayed at the unjustified malice directed toward him (Books, October 31st). Packer's opening paragraph suggests that Hemingway did little more in the Spanish Civil War than eat luxurious breakfasts, "courtesy of the Communist International." But, in both his journalism and his fiction, Hemingway was a shrewd political observer. With "The Spanish Earth" and his widely read dispatches—for which he risked his life—Hemingway helped persuade Americans to support the Republican cause. It is morally reprehensible that some writers on Spain, as Packer notes, have concluded that "the right side won."

Jeffrey Meyers
Kensington, Calif.

THE PLAME AFFAIR

Nicholas Lemann's recent article about the Valerie Plame leak scandal ("Telling Secrets," November 7th) describes Washington journalism clearly and judiciously. But the real issue is that, whatever level of commitment the Bush Administration may have had to a "vast and urgent project of forcefully countering the influence of violently anti-American Islamic fundamentalists in the Arab Middle East," it apparently had no desire to explain it to the rest of us. That is where the press should have come in, and Lemann's article seems to be yet another defense of its role in an indefensible case. Fitzgerald sought journalists' testimony not to uncover their sources but to determine whether they had witnessed a federal crime. The distinction is important. This scandal, ultimately, is less about telling secrets to a prosecutor than about keeping them from the public.

Robert Crooke
Bridgewater, Conn.

It may be, as Lemann writes, "safe to assume that nobody who participated in the outing of Plame as a C.I.A. agent, in the summer of 2003, was mindful that the result of the process...might be a federal crime." But that is hardly the point. The employees of the C.I.A. and similar agencies undertake dangerous and often unpleasant tasks for the benefit of the country as a whole. To do this job, they need to trust that their fellow-citizens respect both their work and the corresponding need to protect their identities. The true concern ought to be that a long chain of people carelessly tossed that trust aside for the sake of winning a few points in a policy debate.

Stephen J. Lubben
Associate Professor of Law
Seton Hall University School of Law
Newark, N.J.

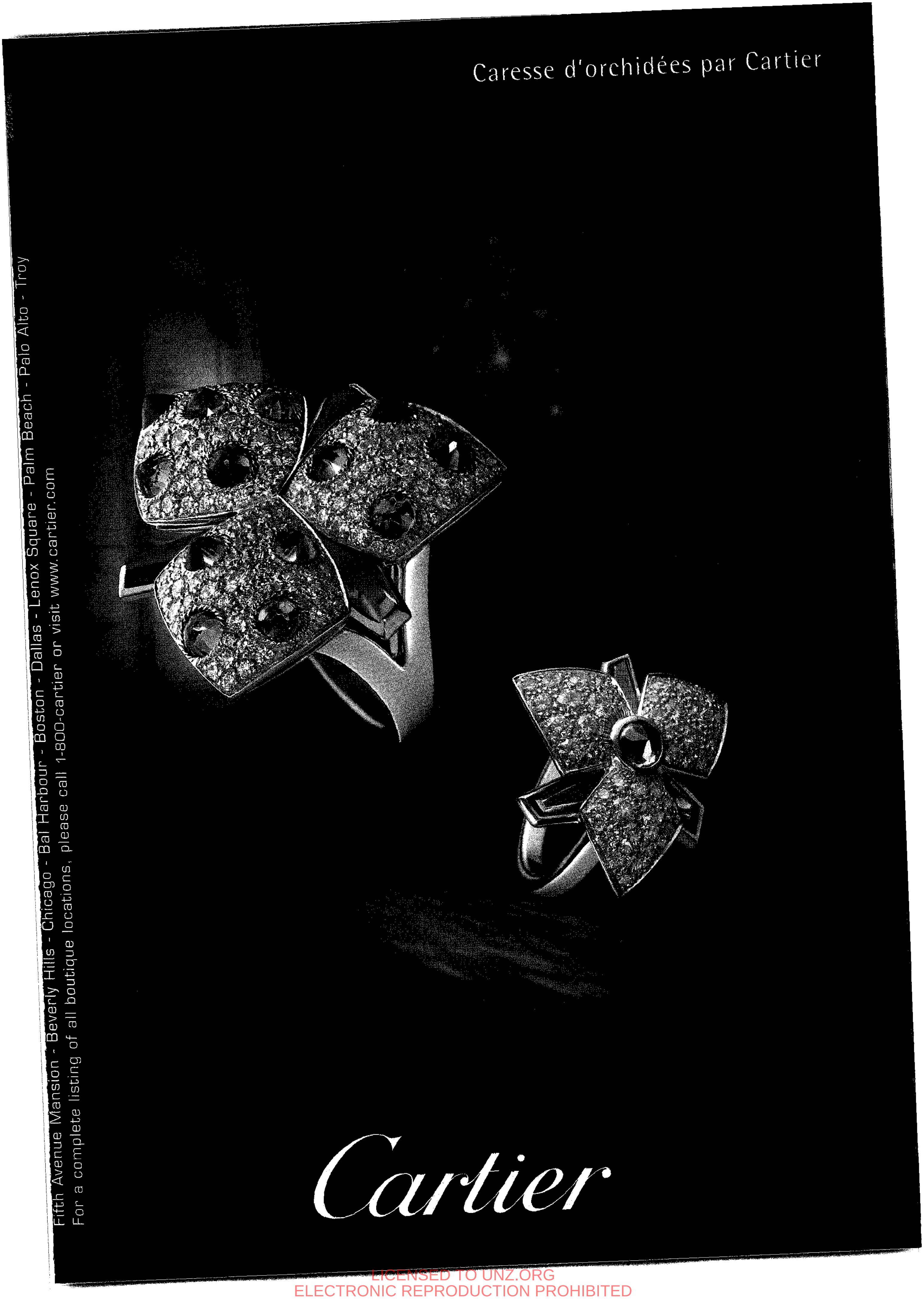
CONSERVATIVE PHILOSOPHY

Tom Reiss's article offers an important commentary on a question central to our time ("The First Conservative," October 24th). Who are conservatives today? Peter Viereck describes himself as a Burkean, inspired by the great eighteenth-century writer, who recognized the power of custom, tradition, and institutions. My understanding of Edmund Burke began with the works of Russell Kirk, Viereck's contemporary. Regarded as the "father of American conservatism," he opposed the senior Bush's Gulf War, ridiculed the National Rifle Association, and was a passionate environmentalist. It is unfortunate that the current Republican Party has cast aside the formidable understanding of conservatism formulated by these two men.

Kenneth E. Moore
Professor Emeritus of Anthropology
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, Ind.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number via e-mail to themail@newyorker.com. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium. All letters become the property of The New Yorker *and will not be returned; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.*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Filming the movie version of Mel Brooks's "The Producers." Photograph by Sylvia Plachy.

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
11	12	13	7	8	9	10

THIS WEEK

THE THEATRE
DANCING QUEEN

Chita Rivera was a Broadway star before "West Side Story," with roles in "Call Me Madam" and "Can-Can," but it was the role of Anita, which she originated in 1957, that defined her career. Now seventy-two, Rivera is starring in "Chita Rivera: The Dancer's Life," a new autobiographical work that chronicles her life and career. The show has a book by Terrence McNally and is directed and choreographed by Graciela Daniele. (See page 12.)

NIGHT LIFE
FLOWER POWER

The psychedelic folk-rocker Donovan, who helped define the sixties and is now seen as a relic of its hippie mind-set, emerges from relative obscurity with a new autobiography, a career retrospective, and a concert tour, which brings him to the New York Society for Ethical Culture this week. (See page 14.)

ART
AFTER THE WAR

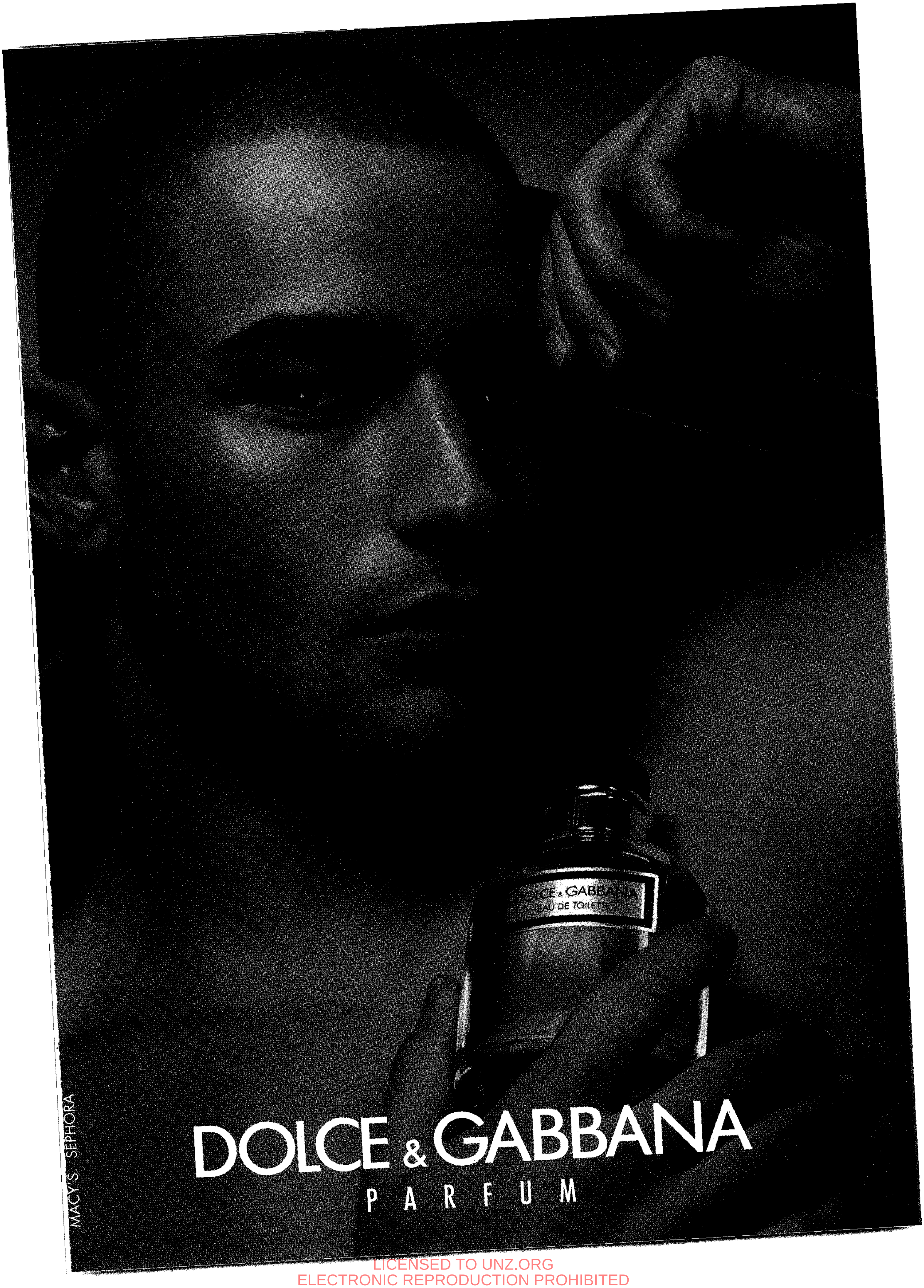
The Drawing Center's "Persistent Vestiges: Drawing from the American-Vietnam War" unites work by American protesters, Vietnamese who sketched the war as it was happening, and younger artists examining the conflict. (See page 18.)

DANCE
PUNK RESTORATION

New York dance lovers celebrated last year when the ballet choreographer Karole Armitage, once dubbed the punk princess of the downtown scene, returned from a long exile in Europe. Her luminous, hallucinatory new dance, "In This Dream That Dogs Me," now playing at the Duke on 42nd Street, shows why. (See page 20.)

MOVIES
GUEST LISTS

Anthology Film Archives celebrates its thirty-fifth anniversary with a weekend of guest-curated screenings. Peter Bogdanovich will present Jean Renoir's "The Rules of the Game," Patti Smith will introduce Robert Bresson's "Au Hasard Balthazar" and read a poem, and Christine Vachon will introduce Jack Smith's "Flaming Creatures" and Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie's "Pull My Daisy." (See page 35.)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EAU DE TOILETTE
DOLCE & GABBANA
PARFUM
MACY'S SEPHORA

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

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CHITA RIVERA: THE DANCER'S LIFE
Rivera, along with a cast of ten, stars in a musical about her life and career, touching on shows by Jerome Robbins, Leonard Bernstein, and Bob Fosse. With a book by Terrence McNally. Directed and choreographed by Graciela Daniele. In previews. Opens Dec. 11. (Shoenfeld, 236 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
Theatreworks's musical based on the Dickens classic. Previews begin Dec. 10. Opens Dec. 15. (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 212-279-4200.)

DOG SEES GOD: CONFESSIONS OF A TEENAGE BLOCKHEAD
Eddie Kaye Thomas, Eliza Dushku, America Ferrera, and Ian Somerhalder star in this tale about an adult cartoon character whose world is populated by a motley crew of comic-strip personalities. Directed by Trip Cullman. In previews. (Century Center for the Performing Arts, 111 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE OTHER SIDE
Manhattan Theatre Club presents Ariel Dorfman's story about a couple living on the border of two war-ravaged countries as they await the return of their son, who ran away thirty years earlier. In previews. Opens Dec. 13. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212.)

THE RAT PACK IS BACK!
Frank's forty-sixth birthday is an occasion for several rounds of Martinis in David Cassidy and Don Reo's musical. Cassidy also directs and stars as the Rat Pack pal Bobby Darin. With music by the Supper Club Big Band. In previews. Opens Dec. 12. (Supper Club, 240 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

A TOUCH OF THE POET
Gabriel Byrne stars as Cornelius Melody, an Irish immigrant who poses as a gentleman in Boston circa 1828, in a Roundabout Theatre production of the Eugene O'Neill play. In previews. Opens Dec. 8. (Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-719-1300.)

'TWAS THE NIGHT BEFORE THE TWELVE DAYS OF A NUT CRACKER CHRISTMAS CAROL
Four Christmas favorites in one, in a downtown dance-and-theatre spectacular. Opens Dec. 15. (P.S. 122, at 150 First Ave. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

ABIGAIL'S PARTY
The New Group ("Avenue Q") presents the New York première of Mike Leigh's biting satire of British suburbia in the seventies, starring Jennifer Jason Leigh. Scott Elliott directs. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

APPARITION
Five ghost stories written by Anne Washburn are performed by an ensemble cast including T. Ryder Smith. (Connelly, 220 E. 4th St. 212-352-3101.)

CELEBRATION / THE ROOM
Neil Pepe directs two plays by the Nobel laureate Harold Pinter as part of the Atlantic Theatre Company's twentieth-anniversary season. (336 W. 20th St. 212-239-6200.)

THE COLOR PURPLE
A new musical based on Alice Walker's novel. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

THE GENTLEMAN DANCING-MASTER
In the New York première of William Wycherley's merry 1672 Restoration comedy, briskly directed by Gus Kaikkonen, the battle of two fops (one Spanish, one French) is filled with terrific comic setups and nimble repartee; even a sprawling last half can't derail the lively good fun. (Pearl, 80 St. Marks Pl. 212-598-9802.)

John Doe and Exene Cervenka bring X to Roseland.

DIVYA SRINIVASAN

HIS ROYAL HIPNESS LORD BUCKLEY IN THE ZAM ZAM ROOM
The mesmerizing Jake Broder incarnates the nineteen-fifties cult lounge performer Lord Buckley on a head-long ride through the late beat philosopher's œuvre. A hot-jazz trio backs Broder as he bops through resurrected spoken-word riffs on the Swinging Pied Piper, Jesus of Nazareth ("The Nazz"), and the Gettysburg Address, cruising the hairpin turns of Buckley's careening mind. Broder gives Buckley none of the standup comic's yearning to be liked; he works the room not for laughs but for moments of mind-expanding exhilaration. The actor's ardent delivery produces the sensation of giddy free fall that won over such Buckley fans as Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, and Robin Williams. Directed by Phillip Breen. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200.)

IN THE CONTINUUM
The fiery young performers Danai Gurira and Nikkole Salter have moved to the Perry Street Theatre with their intelligent (and often comedic) play about the economic dependency, social stigma, and family pressure that black women with H.I.V. face. (31 Perry St. 212-868-4444.)

KLONSKY & SCHWARTZ
Ensemble Studio Theatre presents a new play by Romulus Linney, about the downfall of the poet Delmore Schwartz in the sixties, and the attempt by his partner and acolyte Milton Klonsky to rescue him. (549 W. 52nd St. 212-352-3101.)

MISS WITHERSPOON
A new play by Christopher Durang, directed by Emily Mann. (Reviewed in this issue.) (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

MR. MARMALADE
In Noah Haidle's exhilarating new play (well directed by Michael Greif), which is reminiscent of a 2002 article by Adam Gopnik for this magazine entitled "Bumping Into Mr. Ravioli," the title character is the imaginary friend of a lively but neglected four-year-old called Lucy (Mamie Gummer, making her impressive Off Broadway début). Mr. Marmalade (Michael C. Hall) is a buttoned-down, briefcase-toting simulacrum, one suspects, of Lucy's absent father. Although grownups occasionally intrude on Lucy's busy world—she's the only child of a divorced mother in suburban New Jersey—the events of the play mainly concern the games with which she peoples her solitude, and Lucy's pretensions to adulthood are alternately hilarious and heartbreaking. Her brightness, however, is also a sort of shadow play; it throws oblique but harrowing light on the offstage desolation she endures. (12/5/05) (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

ROPE
The Drama Dept. presents the play that the Alfred Hitchcock movie was based on, about two Oxford students who commit a murder to prove they can get away with it. Directed by David Warren. (Zipper, 336 W. 37th St. 212-239-6200.)

SEASCAPE
Edward Albee's Pulitzer Prize-winning play, directed by Mark Lamos, about two couples who meet on a beach and contemplate life, death, and consciousness. (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

SISTER AND MISS LEXIE
At the Flea Theatre, Brenda Currin reprises her own adaptation of Eudora Welty's work (a collaboration with the director David Kaplan first seen in 1980). In this evocative but overcrowded one-woman show, Currin becomes a host of Welty characters: a piano teacher, an iron-willed schoolmarm, and, most memorably, a Mississippi conjure woman whose white-feathered wings and turban establish her as an intermediary between worlds forgotten and worlds to come. Ayako Morino accompanies on piano. (41 White St. 212-352-3101.)

SOUVENIR
In Stephen Temperley's troubling new play (at the Lyceum), Judy Kaye's portrayal of the life and career of Florence Foster Jenkins, the famously bad singer who became a camp legend in New York before the Second World War, is so real and so heartbreaking that one hardly notices the cheap shots that the director, Vivian Matalon, levels at his heroine. But Kaye, a wise performer, shows us the gorgeous folly that goes into making a work of art. (11/21/05) (149 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

STRIKING 12
Ted Sperling directs this rock-musical-comedy rendition of Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Match Girl." With a book by Rachel Sheinkin. (Ars Nova, 511 W. 54th St. 212-868-4444.)

SWEENEY TODD
Under the bold direction and design of John Doyle, this imported British revival at the Eugene O'Neill, which shrinks the cast of thirty to ten, with actors doubling as musicians, is almost unbearably exciting. Michael Cerveris is a terrifying Sweeney, a model of sulfurous restraint, and Patti LuPone, as his pragmatic and pathological helpmate, Mrs. Lovett, is a gargoyle of toughness. (11/14/05) (230 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200.)

TIGHT EMBRACE
Intar presents a new play by Jorge Ignacio Cortiñas about two women, one pregnant, the other elderly, who are being held prisoner by violent kidnappers. (Kirk, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL
Signature Theatre Company presents Horton Foote's play about a strong-willed sixty-year-old woman (Lois Smith) who escapes her stifling life in Houston and embarks on a journey to return to her girlhood home in a small Texas town. Harris Yulin directs. (Peter Norton Space, 555 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529.)

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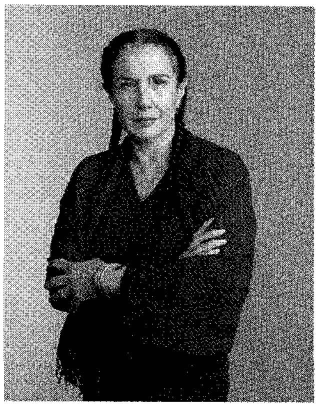
CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MAKING HER MARK

In 1981, Mary Ellen Mark, a frequent contributor to this magazine, published a book of photographs that she had made in Bombay over a three-month period in 1978, when she spent the better part of every day on a street of brothels called Falkland Road. Her subjects were the young prostitutes (the glaring, bare-breasted girl on the book's cover was thirteen) and transvestites who worked the street, some out of cagelike storefronts, others from warrens of crowded cubicles in the tenements above. Many of them had initially thrown garbage, water, and insults at Mark, but she was eventually given complete access to their lives. The disconcerting intimacy of the pictures—now on display at the Boesky and Richardson galleries in Chelsea in conjunction with the book's reissue—never feels exploitative. Mark views these garishly made-up characters with affection and concern. She can't transform their lives, but she can render them clearly and carefully—and, in these brighter, supersaturated new color prints, more vividly than before.

—*Vince Aletti*



MARTIN BELL

THE WOMAN IN WHITE
In Andrew Lloyd Webber's latest offering, adapted by Charlotte Jones from Wilkie Collins's creepy nineteenth-century novel and directed by Trevor Nunn, it's not easy to judge the actors or the play because they're all of a piece, and the score and the lyrics (by David Zippel) are so over-the-top dramatic that it's impossible to have real feeling for any of the characters, let alone their situations. (11/28/05) (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 212-307-4100.)

Also Playing

ALMOST HEAVEN: THE SONGS OF JOHN DENVER: Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 212-239-6200. **ALTAR BOYZ:** Dodger Stages, 340 W. 50th St. 212-239-6200. **AVENUE Q:** Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **BACH AT LEIPZIG:** New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 212-239-6200. **CHICAGO:** Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 212-239-6200. **DIRTY ROTTEN SCOUNDRELS:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **DOUBT:** Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. **FIDDLER ON THE ROOF:** Minskoff, 200 W. 45th St. 212-307-4100. **FOOLS IN LOVE:** Manhattan Ensemble Theatre, 55 Mercer St. 212-239-6200. **HAIRSPRAY:** Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 212-307-4100. **IN MY LIFE:** Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **JERSEY BOYS:** August Wilson, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. **LATINOLOGUES:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE LIGHT IN THE PIAZZA:** Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **MAMMA MIA!:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 212-239-6200. **MONTY PYTHON'S SPAMALOT:** Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **THE ODD COUPLE:** Brooks Atkinson, 256 W. 47th St. 212-307-4100. **ONE-MAN STAR WARS TRILOGY:** Lamb's Theatre, 130 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. **ON SECOND AVENUE:** J.C.C., 334 Amsterdam Ave. 212-239-6200. **ORSON'S SHADOW:** Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-239-6200. **PETER PAN:** Theatre at Madison Square Garden, 4 Penn Plaza. 212-307-1000. **RFK:** The Culture Project, 45 Bleecker St. 212-307-4100. **SWEET CHARITY:** Al Hirschfeld, 302 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. **THIRD:** Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 212-239-6200. **THOM PAIN (BASED ON NOTHING):** DR2, 103 E. 15th St. 212-239-6200. **THE 25TH ANNUAL PUTNAM COUNTY SPELLING BEE:** Circle in the Square, 50th St. between Broadway and Eighth Ave. 212-239-6200. **WAITING FOR GODOT:** Theatre at St. Clement's, 423 W. 46th St. 212-239-6200. **WICKED:** Gershwin, 222 W. 51st St. 212-307-4100.

NIGHT LIFE
ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
237 W. 42nd St. (212-997-4144)—Dec. 10: The eternal funk of **Morris Day and the Time.** Dec. 12-13: **Mos Def** and **Talib Kweli,** the Brooklyn-born m.c.s who first made their name in the nineties with the underground hip-hop outfit Black Star, are back touring together—ironically for musicians whose careers started in such a noncommercial direction—to promote the PlayStation Portable system. Of the two, Mos Def has enjoyed greater fame, as an actor and for his experiments with a synthesis of rock and rap. Kweli's music has continually earned critical acclaim for its pointed social commentaries. He released his most recent solo album, "Right About Now: The Official Sucka Free Mix CD," last month.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (212-533-2111)—Dec. 8: The highly viscous psychedelic rock of **Dead Meadow,** from Washington, D.C. Dec. 10: **Railroad Earth** fuses bluegrass, country, jazz, Celtic folk rock, and even the odd bit of zydeco into a rollicking mix.

BOWERY POETRY CLUB
308 Bowery, at Bleecker St. (212-614-0505)—Dec. 10: The **Scene Is Now,** a downtown chamber-pop ensemble that dates back to 1982, plays tunes from its latest album, "Songbirds Lie." The group's founders, the lyricist, guitarist, and singer Chris Nelson and the keyboardist Philip Dray (who is also a historian and a Pulitzer Prize finalist), came out of New York's No Wave mini-scene in the late seventies. Their work combines a love of classic rock with deadpan humor and erudite and arcane lyrics. The band's been under the radar for much of its existence, but it had a well-deserved rock-star moment this past summer while opening for Yo La Tengo, which did a mean cover of its song "Yellow Sarong."

BROOKLYN LYCEUM
227 Fourth Ave., at President St., Park Slope (718-857-4816)—Dec. 10: The **Sharp Things,** a sprawling ensemble led by the pianist Perry Serpa, specializes in lush, retro pop. Guest stars, puppets, and poetry are promised for their holiday show.

CANAL ROOM
285 West Broadway (212-941-8100)—Dec. 12: The **Sister Gertrude Morgan Experience.** This show supports a toy drive for victims of Hurricane Katrina. The main attraction is the presence of a Crescent City legend, or at least her voice. The singing of Sister Gertrude Morgan, a New Orleans preacher, painter, and poet who died in 1980, is featured on a propulsive new album crafted by the producer King Britt. One of Britt's earlier outfits, **Digable Planets,** will also perform a d.j. set.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (212-777-6800)—Dec. 7: **Tosca,** a side project of the dance-floor king Richard Dorfmeister, featuring the classical pianist Rupert Huber. The pair have been turning out entrancing albums for nearly a decade, but this is their first U.S. tour. Dec. 9: The beloved bar band **Marah,** formerly of Philadelphia and now of Brooklyn. Dec. 10: The **East Village Opera Company** gives a guitar crunch to classic overtures.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (212-539-8777)—Dec. 8: **Kelly Joe Phelps,** a lapsed jazz guitarist who now plays acoustic country blues. With the Virginia songwriter **Paul Curreri.** Dec. 8-10: **Betty,** the pop-rock-cabaret band led by Elizabeth Ziff, Alyson Palmer, and Amy Ziff, rings in the holidays. Also on Dec. 10: **Travis Sullivan's Bjorkestra** rearranges the Icelandic dynamo's repertoire for an eighteen-piece jazz band. Dec. 11: It's Christmas in Killarney with the Celtic group **Teada.**

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (212-260-4700)—Dec. 8: The local quartet **Group Sounds** takes great joy in updating the mod approach of the Clash, the Jam, and other long-gone icons. Dec. 10: The anguished soundscapes of the string trio **Tarantula A.D.** Dec. 11: **Laura Veirs** is a singer-songwriter from Seattle with the look of an earnest librarian and the imagination of a gifted author.

NEW YORK SOCIETY FOR ETHICAL CULTURE
2 W. 64th St. (212-874-5210)—Dec. 7 and Dec. 9: **Donovan,** the premier practitioner of fanciful psychedelic pop and ethereal folk rock, is on tour, celebrating forty years of single-name recognition. Dec. 8: **Blackmore's Night,** a Renaissance-music ensemble with a curious pedigree, offers a holiday program. Some ten years ago, Ritchie Blackmore, a heavy-metal guitarist known for his work with the bands Deep Purple and Rainbow, started recording with Candice Night, a model turned singer with a passion for old music—very old music. In 1997, they released the first Blackmore's Night album, "Shadow of the Moon," which includes a contribution from the original rock-and-roll minstrel, the flutist Ian Anderson, of Jethro Tull.

NOKIA THEATRE TIMES SQUARE
Broadway at 44th St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 11: **Fiona Apple,** the outspoken, smoky-voiced chanteuse with a reputation for eccentricity, has returned with a new album, "Extraordinary Machine," the subject of fierce Internet discussion prior to its release.

NORTHSIX
66 N. 6th St., Williamsburg, Brooklyn (718-599-5103)—Dec. 7: The **Subways,** a young British trio, trades in plaintive guitar-driven rock and exhortations of teen-age dissatisfaction.

ROSELAND
239 W. 52nd St. (212-307-7171)—Dec. 9: **X,** the band that put California on the punk-rock map, rose out of Los Angeles in the late seventies, riding high on the manic rockabilly guitar of Billy Zoom and the off-kilter harmonies of the bassist

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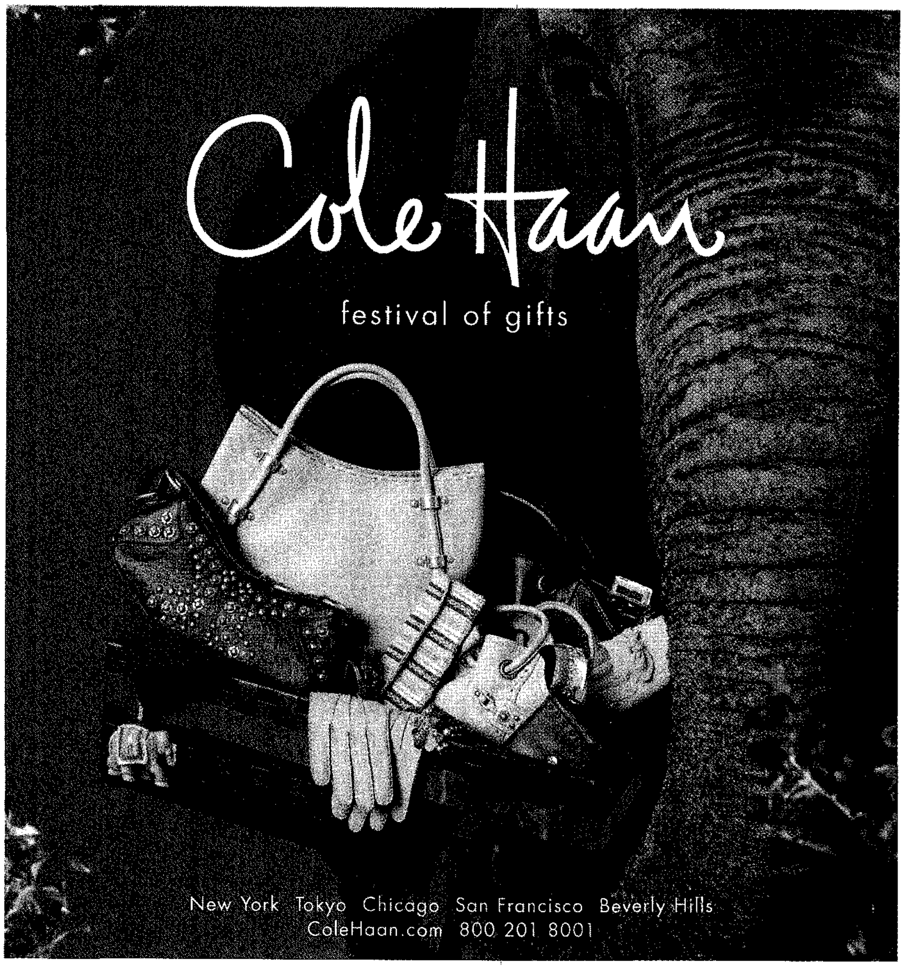

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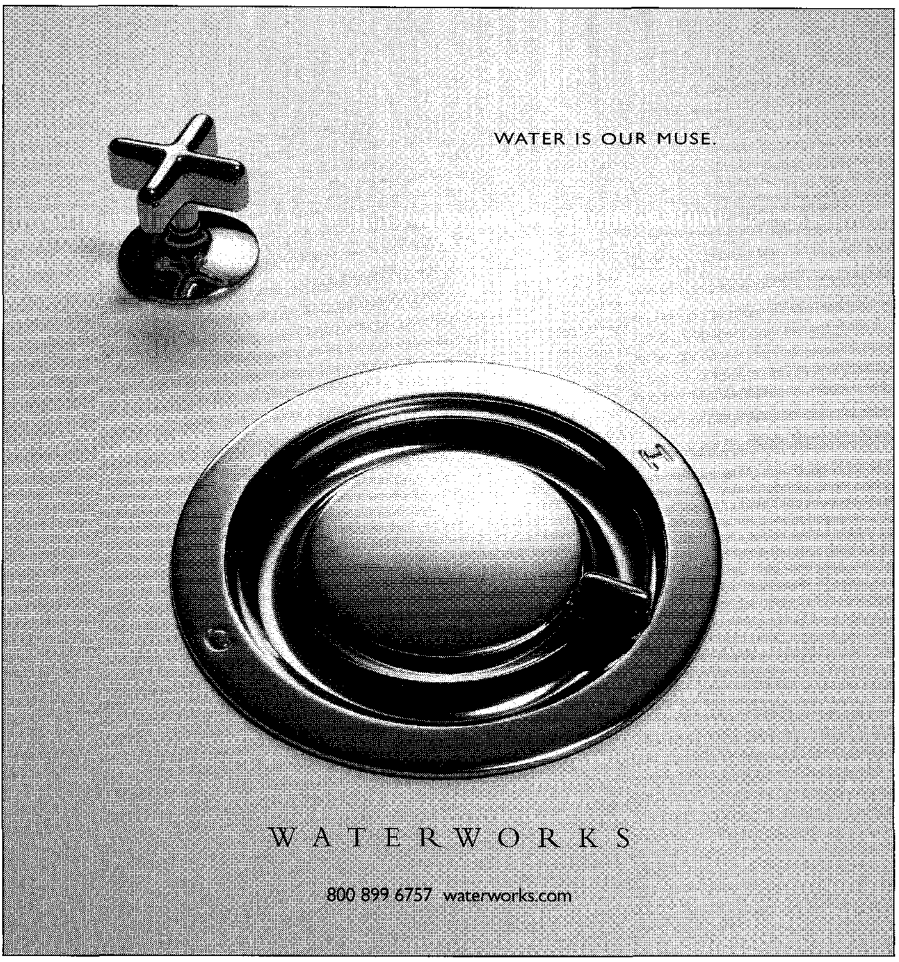

John Doe and the vocalist Exene Cervenka. Over more than half a dozen albums, X evolved from playing a slam-dance style to embracing roots rock and Americana and prefiguring the alt-country movement. Zoom departed in the mid-eighties, but he returned in 1998 and restored the band's signature bite.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (212-358-7503)—Dec. 10: The **Akron/Family** plays passionate and unorthodox folk music that embraces dissonant rock guitar and Beach Boys-like vocal harmonies.

WARSAW
261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn (718-387-0505)—Dec. 10: The New York trio **Soulive** delivers a mash of jazz, funk, soul, and hip-hop.

WEBSTER HALL
125 E. 11th St. (212-353-1600)—Dec. 9: The Irish vocalist **Sinéad O'Connor** performs material from her new album, "Throw Down Your Arms," a collection of reggae songs she recorded with the legendary Jamaican rhythm section **Sly and Robbie,** who join her here.

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (212-475-8592)—Dec. 6-11: **Chris Botti,** who looks like Sting (a former employer) and sounds like a diluted Miles Davis, plays middlebrow jazz at its least taxing.

DIZZY'S CLUB COCA-COLA
Broadway at 60th St. (212-258-9595)—Dec. 6-11: **Donal Fox's Monk and Bach Project.** Fox, a pianist as fluent in classical music as he is in jazz, brings together his two loves; he has a pair of sensitive collaborators in the bassist **George Mraz** and the drummer **Lewis Nash.**

FEINSTEIN'S AT THE REGENCY
540 Park Ave., at 61st St. (212-339-4095)—Through Dec. 10 and again from Dec. 16-31: **Michael Feinstein** performs his seasonal show. Dec. 12-15: The Broadway standout **Rebecca Luker,** a Tony nominee in 2000 for her role in "The Music Man," pays tribute to female songwriters old and new.

IRIDIUM
1650 Broadway, at 51st St. (212-582-2121)—Dec. 7-11: Fusion lives again when the drummer **Steve Smith** stops by with his Vital Information band; it includes **Tom Coster,** a keyboardist for Santana back in the seventies, and the guitarist **Frank Gambale,** formerly of the Chick Corea Elektric Band. Mondays belong to the electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.** The **Mingus Big Band** takes over on Tuesdays.

JAZZ GALLERY
290 Hudson St., near Spring St. (212-242-1063)—Dec. 9-10: The eclectic saxophonist and composer **Peter Apfelbaum,** who was recently spotted jamming at Roseland with former Phish guitarist Trey Anastasio, leads his New York Hieroglyphics band. Dec. 13: The pianists **Luis Perdomo** and **Jason Lindner** go head to head.

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (212-576-2232)—Dec. 8-11: The hard-grooving triumvirate of the guitarist **Peter Bernstein,** the keyboardist **Larry Goldings,** and the drummer **Bill Stewart.**

SWEET RHYTHM
88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (212-255-3626)—The drummer **Rashied Ali** used to tangle with John Coltrane in high-powered duets. On Dec. 8 he takes on the saxophonist **Sonny Fortune.**

TOWN HALL
123 W. 43rd St. (212-840-2824)—Dec. 8: The jazz-diva aspirant **Jane Monheit** offers holiday fare from her new album, "The Season."

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (212-255-4037)—Dec. 6-11: **Joe Lovano.** Whether working with a lean rhythm section or a beefed-up ensemble like the eleven-piece unit he fronts here, the saxophonist remains one of the most satisfying improvisers of our time, and a bandleader who chooses his company wisely. The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART
MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (212-535-7710)—The devotional paintings in **"Fra Angelico"** are lit up with heavenly blues, blood reds, and pure golds. Rewarding long contemplation, they can feel like love letters, passed down through the centuries from the fifteenth-century Tuscan artist. Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Vincent van Gogh: The Drawings."** Through Dec. 31. ♦ The British Museum was founded in 1753, and its collection of drawings numbers some fifty thousand. It's no wonder that Americans have never before seen most of the masterworks presented in **"Clouet to Seurat: French Drawings from the British Museum."** Jean Clouet (ca. 1475-ca. 1541) starts things off with the lovely, wimpled head of an amused-looking maiden, and things proceed apace through the roster of famous French names, until Degas wins the nineteenth-century laurels with two arresting images, one a pair of ballerinas picked out in thinned oil paint on electric green paper, the other a portly lady goggling back at us through field glasses. Through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Prague: The Crown of Bohemia, 1347-1437."** Through Jan. 3. ♦ The pre-Photoshop images in **"The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult"** were purported to depict ghosts, spirit writing, ectoplasm, and the like. Through Dec. 31. ♦ **"David Milne Watercolors: 'Painting Toward the Light.'"** A subset of a larger show organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario, these forty-five watercolor depictions of New York State scenes provide a rare chance to see the work of the Canadian artist (1882-1953) outside his home country. Through Jan. 29. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9400)—**"Beyond the Visible: The Art of Odilon Redon"** spans the French symbolist's work from nightmarish charcoal drawings to jewel-toned oils and pastels. Through Jan. 23. ♦ The retrospective exhibition **"Elizabeth Murray"** includes many of the shaped and splintered canvases covered with energizing color combinations for which the artist is best known. In the second-floor galleries, a selection of Murray's prints adapt similar techniques to paper. Through Jan. 9. ♦ The fever pitch of post-9/11 anxiety is simultaneously stoked and suppressed in **"SAFE: Design Takes on Risk,"** an exhibition of objects designed to ward off, stanch, or manage disaster. Through Jan. 2. (Open Wednesdays through Mondays, 10:30 to 5:30, and Friday evenings until 8.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (212-423-3500)—The sprawling exhibition **"Russia!"** includes most everything you might think could fit under that rubric: gilt religious icons dating from the Middle Ages, Renaissance-era Western European paintings from imperial collections, romanticized portraits of peasant life, socialist-realist propaganda, early modernist masterworks from the collections of industrialists, videos made just this year. Through Jan. 11. (Open Saturdays through Wednesdays, 10 to 5:45, and Fridays, 10 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (800-944-8639)—**"The Art of Richard Tuttle."** Through Feb. 5. ♦ Ed Ruscha's installation of paintings **"Course of Empire"**—which shares a name and theme with Thomas Cole's 1833-1836 cycle of paintings, in the New-York Historical Society's permanent collection—was a hit at the Venice Biennale and is on view at the Whitney through Jan. 29. ♦ **"Raymond Pettibon."** Thirty-seven drawings and an animated film. Through Feb. 19. ♦ The retrospective **"Oscar Bluemner: A Passion for Color"** reveals a painter (1867-1938) who melded Old World influences with an architect's training and eye—updated later by the lessons of the Fauves, Die Brücke, and artists like Franz Marc—to produce images of buildings and landscapes broken into bright structural shards, like segments of stained glass. Through Feb. 12. ♦ **"Still Life: A Vital Theme."** Through Jan. 15. (Open Wednesdays, Thursdays, and weekends, 11 to 6, and Fridays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (212-769-5100)—**"Darwin"** traces the discoveries and influence of the great

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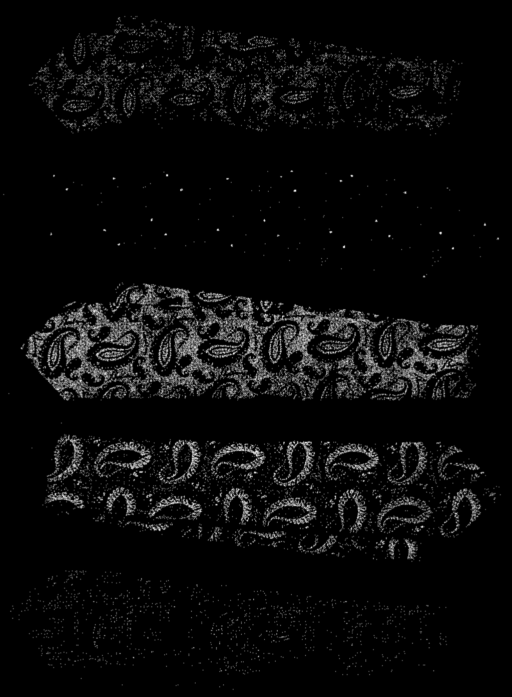

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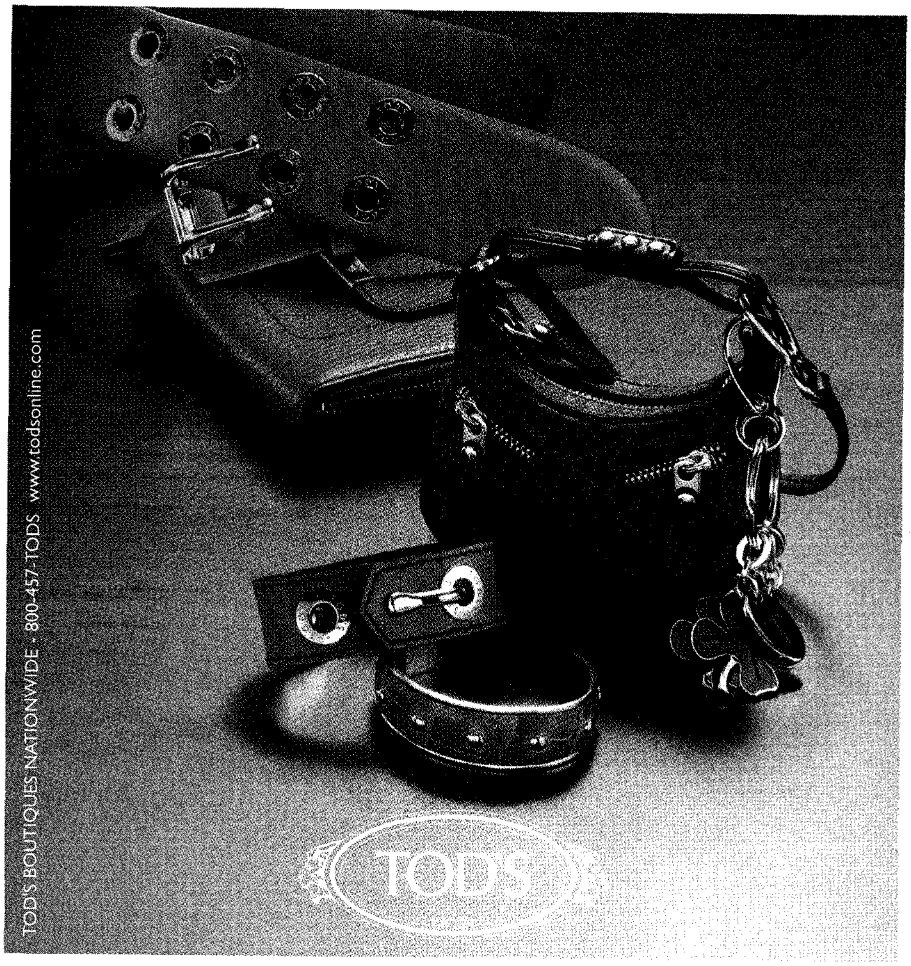

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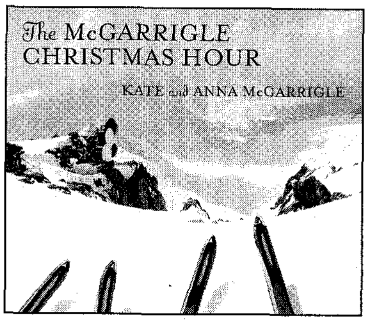
Words on Music

Borders Folk music expert Sarah Gudmundson says:
"Nothing adds depth to vocal harmonies like shared history, as Canadian folk singers **Kate and Anna McGarrigle** demonstrate in a collaborative holiday effort that brims with an easygoing warmth and charm."



N NONESUCH

The acclaimed singer-songwriters and their extended musical family evoke the spirit of the season in the manner of a parlor gathering that includes **Emmylou Harris, Rufus Wainwright, and Martha Wainwright,** among others. ***The McGarrigle Christmas Hour*** features a varied program of fresh originals, evergreen standards, traditional melodies in English and French, and contemporary tunes.

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naturalist (1809-82) with, among other things, a recreation of his study, samples of fossils he collected, and live specimens of the tortoises, frogs, and iguanas that he encountered in his travels to the Galápagos Islands. *Through May 29.* ♦ **"Dinosaurs: Ancient Fossils, New Discoveries,"** a review of recent developments in the study of dinosaurs, provides insight into how the animals moved through their world. *Through Jan. 8.* ♦ **"The Butterfly Conservatory: Tropical Butterflies Alive in Winter"** is back for an eighth year. *Through May 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45.)*

DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster St. (212-219-2166)—**"Persistent Vestiges: Drawing from the American-Vietnam War."** In the main gallery, two young Vietnamese-Americans—Dinh Q. Lê and Binh Danh—share space with protest veterans Nancy Spero and Martha Rosler, while across the street the Drawing Room presents sketches by Vietnamese "combat artists" who reported from the front. Both Lê and Danh use photography to evoke the conflict's mournful legacy: Lê's woven photocollages mix movie stills with documentary images, while Danh transfers portraits, eerily, onto dry leaves. Spero's anguished murals are populated by fire-dropping helicopters, and Rosler's famous series "Bringing the War Home" inserts soldiers and explosions into complacent home-décor scenes (here presented in the original, cut-paper versions). Meanwhile, Nguyen Cong Do, Nguyen Thu, Nguyen Van Da, Quang Tho, Truong Hieu, and Vu Giang Huong concentrate on camaraderie. Their quick, intense pen-and-ink drawings and watercolors show soldiers—many of them women—working, eating, and talking, while villagers in conical hats pole their skiffs through rice paddies. Through Feb. 11; the Drawing Room portion of the show closes Dec. 21. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 to 6, and Saturdays, 11 to 6.)

FRICK COLLECTION
1 E. 70th St. (212-288-0700)—Some one hundred paintings by the Netherlandish artist Hans Memling (ca. 1435-94) survive; of the thirty portraits, twenty are at the Frick for the exhibition **"Memling's Portraits."** Through Dec. 31. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6, and Sundays, 11 to 5.)

NEUE GALERIE
1048 Fifth Ave., at 86th St. (212-628-6200)—**"Egon Schiele,"** an exhibition of more than a hundred and fifty paintings and drawings by the Austrian artist, who died in 1918, at the age of twenty-eight. Through Feb. 20. (Open Fridays, 11 to 9, and Saturdays through Mondays and Thursdays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Galleries are usually open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6; please call the gallery for exact hours.

CHARLES BURCHFIELD
While most serious painters of his generation worked in oil, Burchfield (1893-1967), an Ohio native, took on watercolor, the preferred medium of ladies and Sunday painters. The landscapes of this preëminent naturalist range from visionary to realist. "The Butterfly Tree," a bright concoction in tropical yellow and black that leans toward abstraction, represents the former; the muted, gray-blue image of the "House on Allen Road, North of Sardinia" the latter. One can see why Burchfield has never approached the renown of contemporaries like Hopper, whose works are lodged in the American unconscious; only a few, like "The Dark Ravine" or "Sunlight Behind Two Pines," hint at something complex or sinister. The rest are just too darn pleasant. Through Dec. 23. (DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave. 212-247-2111.)

"TIFFANY/POLLOCK" / BEREND STRIK
Richard Tuttle made the clever suggestion that a dialogue between Jackson Pollock's paintings and the Art Nouveau glassworks of Louis Comfort Tiffany might reveal something about each; Jack Tilton has carried out the idea with a two-room exhibition that sets stained-glass lamps and blown-glass vases against Ab Ex drip paintings. The two approaches to line and light are surprisingly harmonious, as in the case of a starry white-on-black dripped collage that one could imagine as the night sky over moonlit rushes on a glass lamp-

shade. Downstairs, the Dutch artist Strik's stitched-over photographs seem to be on the edge of the conversation, with colorful contours delicately embroidered on or around vaguely familiar images. Through Dec. 23. (Jack Tilton, 8 E. 76th St. 212-737-2221.)

Short List

ELLIOTT ERWITT: Houk, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-750-7070. Through Jan. 14. **ALBERTO GIACOMETTI:** PaceWildenstein, 32 E. 57th St. 212-421-3292. Through Dec. 17. **JOHN GRAHAM:** Stone, 113 E. 90th St. 212-987-4997. Through Dec. 22. **PHILIP GUSTON:** McKee, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-688-5951. Through Dec. 17. **YVES KLEIN:** L & M Arts, 45 E. 78th St. 212-861-0020. Through Dec. 10. **BARRY LE VA:** Mary Boone, 745 Fifth Ave. 212-752-2929. Through Dec. 17. **COLLIER SCHORR:** Roth, 160A E. 70th St. 212-717-9067. Through Dec. 17. **CY TWOMBLY:** Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313. Through Dec. 24.

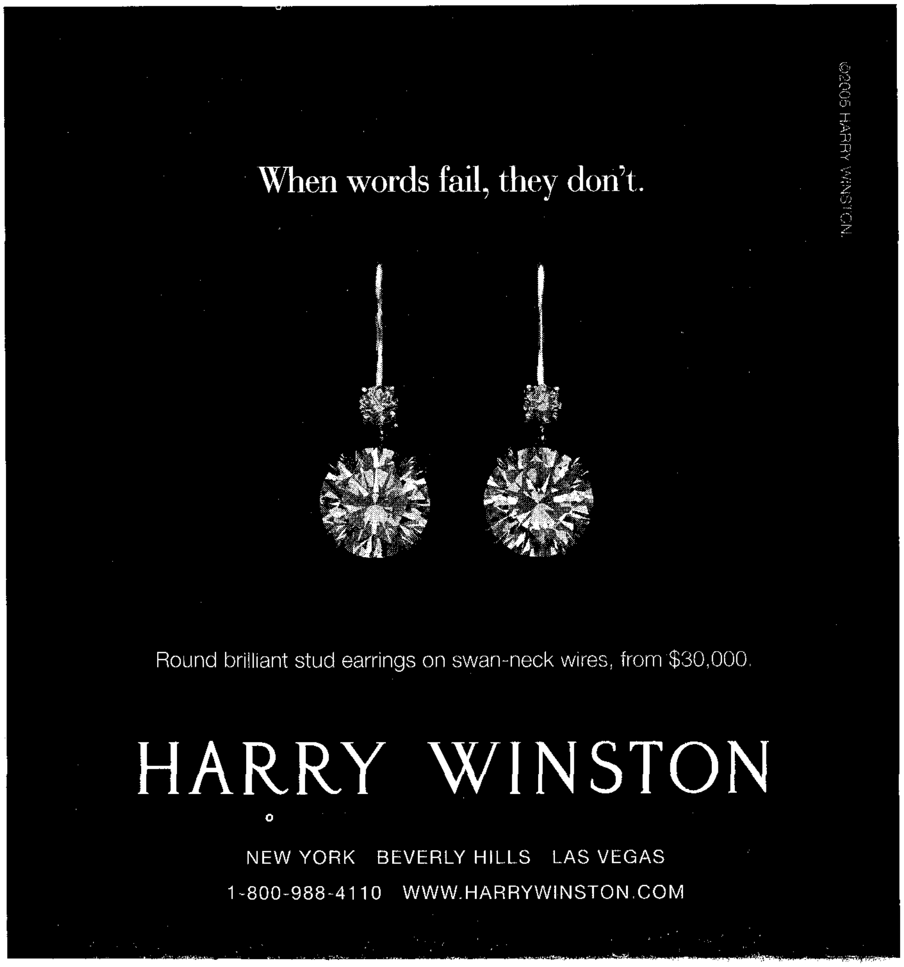
GALLERIES–CHELSEA

APRIL GORNIK
The drama of clouds, sunsets, and storms on the sea harks back to nineteenth-century Romantic painting, but Gornik goes a step further. Where old-school landscape artists like Constable faithfully captured weather patterns, she makes a case for painting as metaphor for meteorology: a realm of spectacular effects. Brilliant blue peeks through clouds in "Spinning Sky"; pink and orange morph in "Sunset at the Equator." The dialogue between painting and photography is also implicit, since Gornik's canvases have a slick look that conjures digital manipulations or nineteenth-century photographic-negative trickery. But unlike those images, in which practitioners generally covered their tracks, a closer look reveals the hand of the artist, vividly present. Through Dec. 23. (Danese, 535 W. 24th St. 212-223-2227.)

RONI HORN
Horn's objective—to demonstrate how things may change and simultaneously remain the same—remains consistent. She's done it with rivers, clowns, and ordinary people. Now the French actress Isabelle Huppert is captured in a hundred and ten photographs, assuming roles from her film career. Using her face alone, Huppert becomes everyone from Erica in "The Piano Teacher" to Emma in "Madame Bovary." Accompanying the photos are drawings that have been cut up and reconstructed, so that their arcing lines dance around the page. Two glass sculptures—opposingly weighty and luminous—toy with minimalist concerns. The color red repeats throughout the work, in the glass, the drawings, and the freckled northern-Gallic coloring of *la grande* Huppert. Through Dec. 23. (Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. 212-243-0200.)

MIKE KELLEY
Kelley's post-Halloween fun house is filled with vampires, ghosts, and ghouls played by faux-adolescent thespians and leotard-clad dancers. A high-school yearbook serves as the source for this cacophonous pageant. Original black-and-white yearbook photographs of teen-agers dressed in wacky costumes, engaged in unidentifiable, extracurricular rites of passage, hang next to obsessively faithful photographic re-creations and pendant sculptures that spin and whirl, flash with video images, and blurt out noise. Kelley's instinct is typically impeccable. He's hit a rich vein of collective memory and horror—depending on one's perspective—that looks from a remove like a strange country. The germ of this is lost in execution, however, becoming instead an over-funded carnival of objects, images, and blaring sound. Through Dec. 17. (Gagosian, 555 W. 24th St. 212-741-1111.)

ANDY WARHOL
The male nude, frequently cropped to focus on a key anatomical detail, was a perennial subject for Warhol, so it's no surprise that a group of previously unexhibited photographs from the late nineteen-eighties should pop up nearly twenty years later. What is surprising is how flat and uninteresting they are. Many have been literally stitched together in grids of four or six identical black-and-white images—one of the most elegant formats in Warhol's repertoire of



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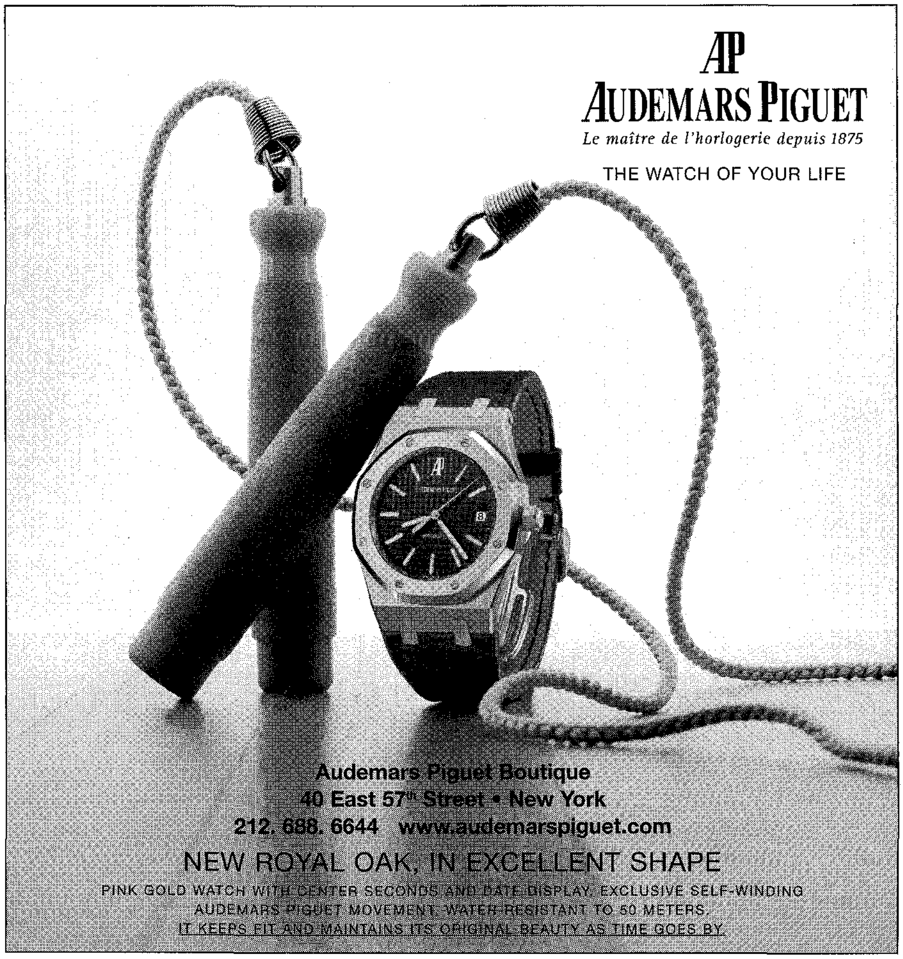

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“Ft. Dix, N.J., 1951,” by Elliott Erwitt, from the show “Towards a Social Landscape,” at Houk.

repetition—but are undermined here by lifeless material. “Blow Job” (1964), screening continuously in the gallery’s side space, provides the rush of rude, witty eroticism that’s missing from the pleasure-deprived main rooms. Through Dec. 17. (Cheim & Read, 547 W. 25th St. 212-242-7737.)

Short List

TRACEY EMIN: Lehmann Maupin, 540 W. 26th St. 212-255-2923. Through Dec. 17. **HANS HAACKE:** Cooper, 534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105. Through Dec. 23. **MAIRA KALMAN:** Saul, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-627-2410. Through Dec. 10. **MARY ELLEN MARK:** Boesky, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-680-9889; and Richardson, 535 W. 22nd St. 646-230-9610. Through Dec. 23. **TIM NOBLE AND SUE WEBSTER:** Bortolami Dayan, 510 W. 25th St. 212-727-2050. Through Dec. 23. **BILL VIOLA:** James Cohan, 533 W. 26th St. 212-714-9500. Through Dec. 22. **REBECCA WARREN:** Marks, 523 W. 24th St. 212-243-0200. Through Dec. 23. **"TWIXT TWO WORLDS, OR THE UNINVITED GUEST: A MAGICIAN AT THE SÉANCE":** Burgin, 243 W. 18th St. 212-462-2668. Through Dec. 10.

GALLERIES–DOWNTOWN

MARA BODIS-WOLLNER

For her New York solo début, this young photographer says she’s zeroing in on “the experience of disappointment amidst celebration.” But because her subjects are almost exclusively women and girls gathered for birthday, cocktail, or dinner parties, Bodis-Wollner is also taking on the fraught dynamics of female relationships. In these carefully orchestrated tableaux, she invites us into minefields trip-wired by intricate webs of connection and exclusion. The reference point here is Tina Barney, who deploys her patented blend of naturalism and artifice in similarly social settings. Although Bodis-Wollner’s work is more effortful than Barney’s, when she loosens up she has an eloquence and precision all her own. Through Dec. 22. (Bekman, 6 Spring St. 212-219-0166.)

FRED EERDEKENS

A series of sculptures toying with light, Eerdekens’s objects concentrate on language. What appear to be abstract curlicues of aluminum or copper wire resolve their cast shadows into scripted sentences, while faux bits of nature—an artificial tree, sunlight on water represented by spotlights on bits of mirror scattered on the floor—also yield up written messages. It’s an appealing, if not entirely original, idea, executed in sensitive, if not masterly, terms. Through Dec. 22. (Spencer Brownstone, 39 Wooster St. 212-334-3455.)

KEHINDE WILEY

Equestrian portraits of generals and royals by David, Le Brun, Rubens, and Velázquez are reimagined with black men sitting in the saddles and wearing baseball caps and Nikes. Militarism, patriotism, heroism, and kitsch mix in the enormous, hyperrealist images, in which camouflage outfits, tattoos, and gold jewelry figure prominently. It’s a brilliant idea, and it’s too bad that the paintings are so vociferously tacky—a less ironic homage to the original artists would have brought Wiley’s point home more forcefully. A short “making-of” video speaks to this, documenting the photo shoot that established the poses. While a trainer gets the steeds to champ and rear, the young models practice gestures of leadership and valor with formidable natural majesty. Through Dec. 10. (Deitch, 76 Grand St. 212-343-7300.)

DANCE

"THE NUTCRACKER"

New York City Ballet performs Balanchine’s version of this classic Christmas story, which captures the poignancy of the moment at which a girl is about to leave her childhood behind. (New York State Theatre, Lincoln Center. 212-870-5570. Dec. 6-8 at 6, Dec. 9 at 8, Dec. 10 at 2 and 8, Dec. 11 at 1 and 5, and Dec. 13 at 6. Through Dec. 30.)

ALVIN AILEY AMERICAN DANCE THEATRE

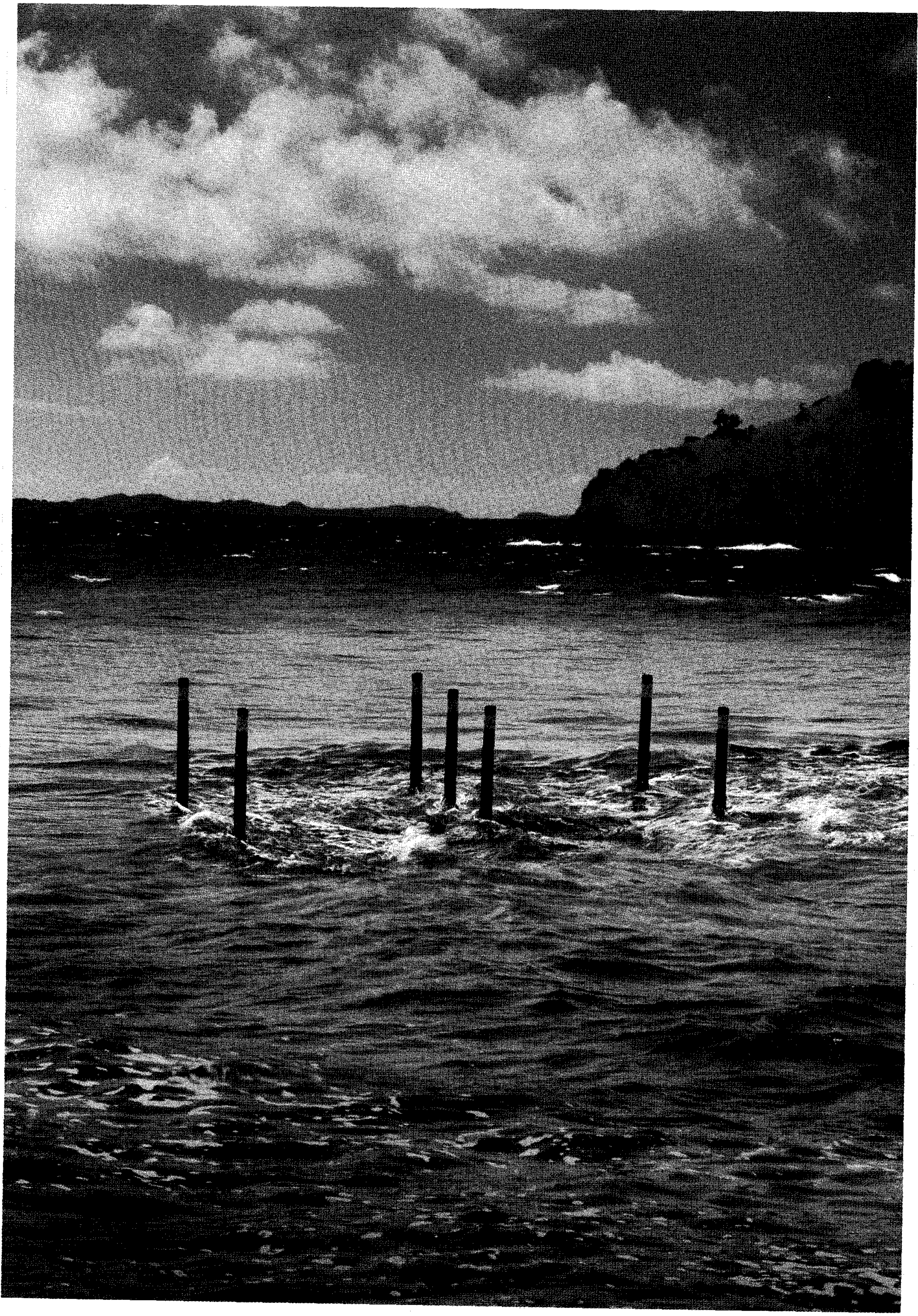
In its second of five weeks at City Center, Alvin Ailey has a première of a new work by Ronald K. Brown, the creator of the most original dances to enter the company’s repertory in the past few years. Like his earlier works “Grace” and “Serving Nia,” “Ife/My Heart” is a spiritual journey, but this third effort is more inwardly directed. Loosely following three families, “Ife” portrays an attempt to spread love from the home, where it starts, to the world, which needs it. Also premièring is a new production of “Urban Folk Dance,” a love-in-the-city quartet by another of the company’s favorite choreographers, the late Ulysses Dove. (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 7-9 at 8, Dec. 10 at 2 and 8, Dec. 11 at 3 and 7:30, and Dec. 13 at 7. Through Jan. 1.)

ARMITAGE GONE! DANCE

Karole Armitage’s work has always come in trendy packages. In the eighties, it was East Village chic; now it’s Benetton-ad multicultural. But deeper down, the dances show a true classicist, twisting and extending ballet à la Balanchine. For her new piece, “In This Dream That Dogs Me,” the set, once again by David Salle, incorporates red velvet curtains and calligraphically arranged piping. Calligraphy also marks the choreography, the movement now sinuous, now angular. Krumping, the frenetic Los Angeles street form, makes a brief appearance, but the heart of the work is a series of pas de deux in which a woman is clearly in control—no matter how languorous she seems, how hauled, bent, or stretched. With live music by Annie Gosfield. (The Duke on 42nd Street, 229 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Dec. 6 and Dec. 8-9 at 8, Dec. 10 at 2 and 8, Dec. 11 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 13 at 8. Through Dec. 18.)

SASHA WALTZ

The German choreographer returns to BAM with “Impromptus,” a set of dances set to piano pieces by Schubert. Upon a striking set of raked platforms that incorporate a sunken pool, the dancers run in circles,



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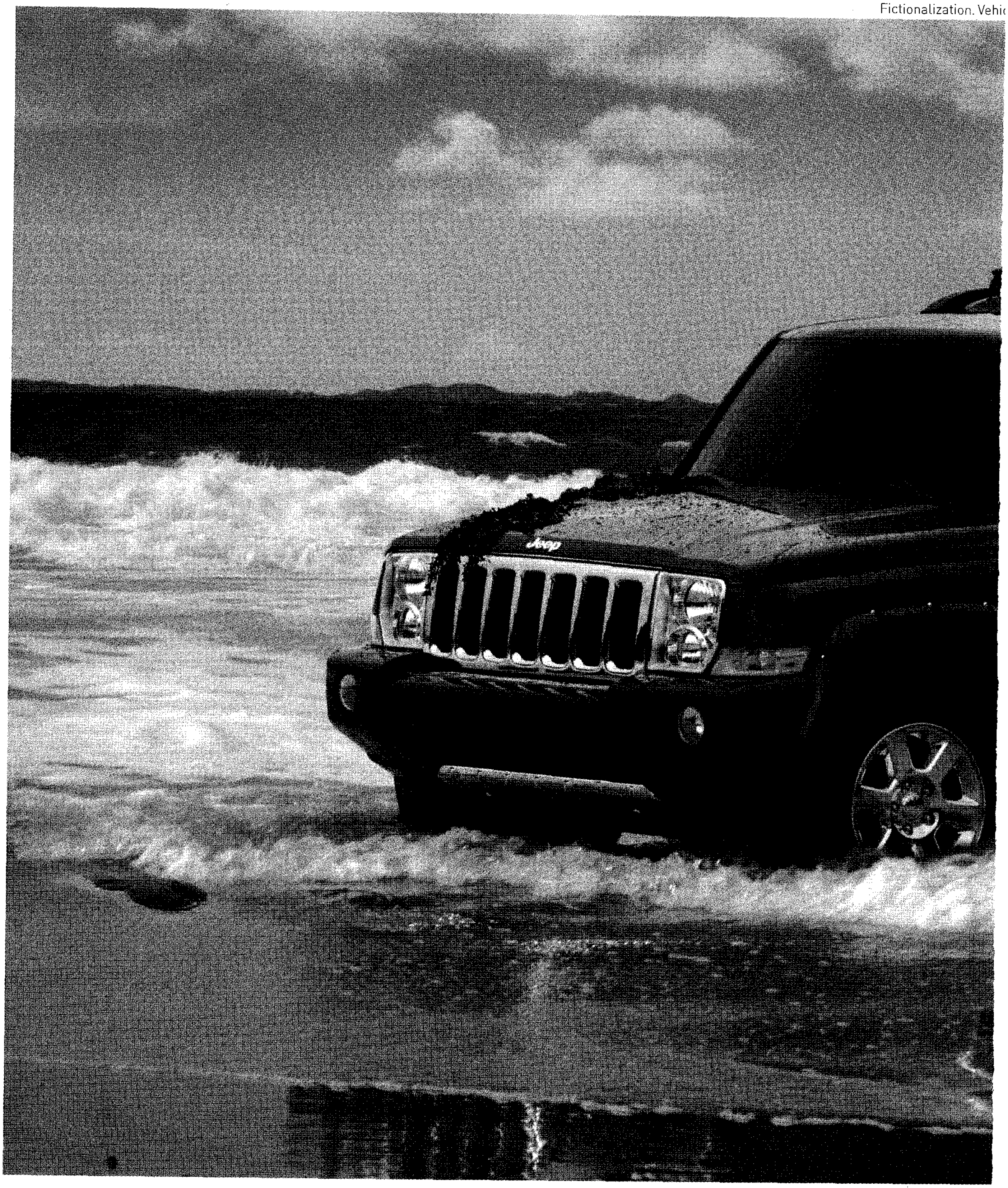

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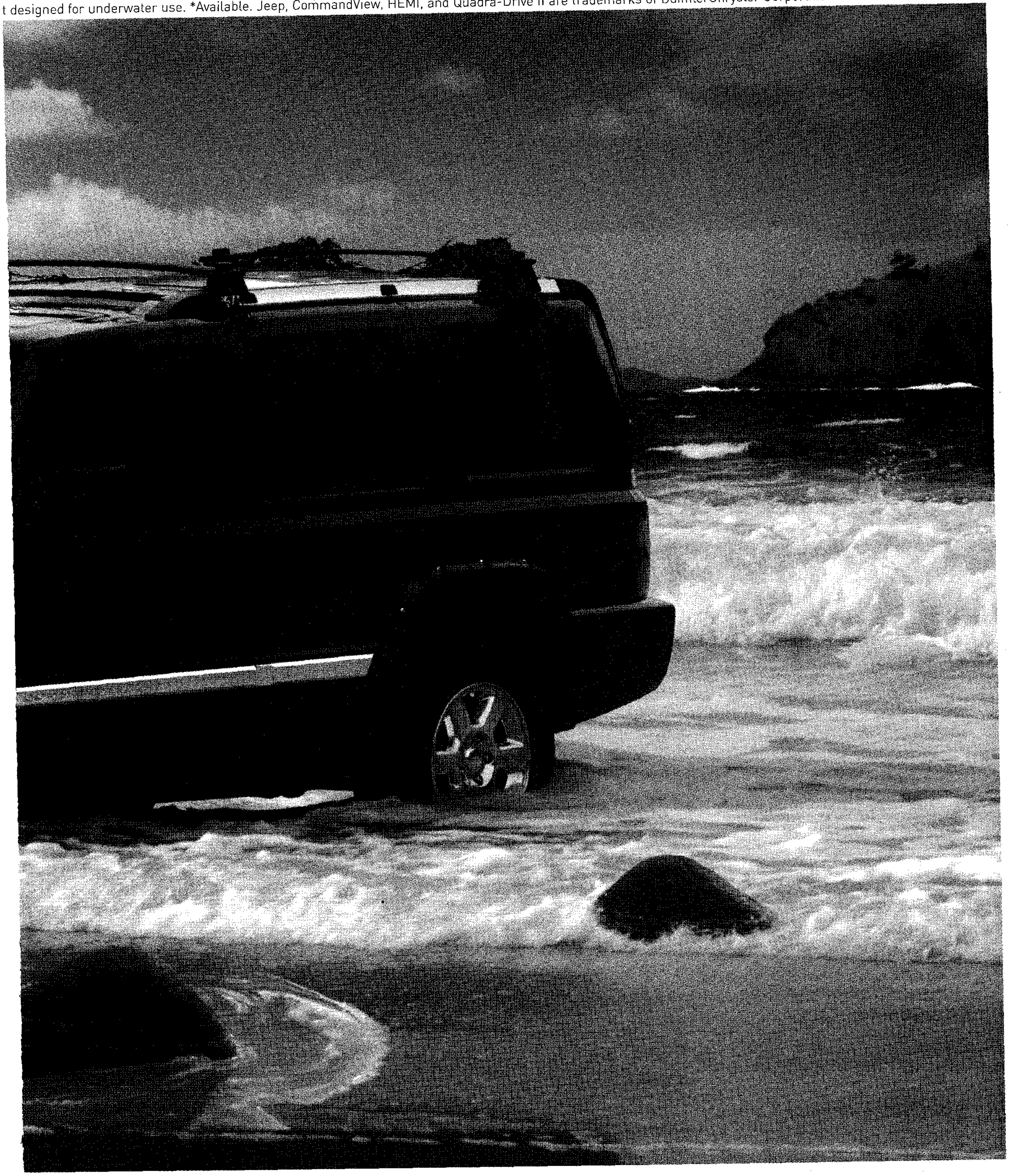

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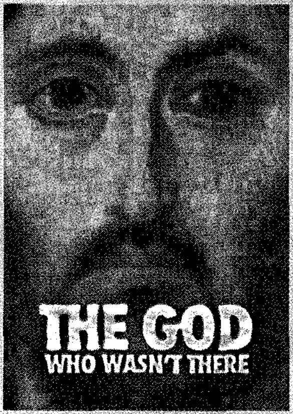

"Brian Flemming's most famous project was 2001's *Bat Boy: The Musical*, an off-Broadway show based on the tabloid-created bat child. Now he's turned his attention to a figure he claims is equally fictional: Jesus Christ. His new documentary, *The God Who Wasn't There*, irreverently lays out the case that Jesus Christ never existed."
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stopping, starting, and reversing, as if they were playing Red Light, Green Light. Though moments of whimsical humor and invention erupt, the presiding tone is ritualistic, so that when the performers smear poster paint on one another and the floor, their getting dirty seems less playful than Freudian. With accompaniment by the pianist Cristina Marton and the mezzo-soprano Judith Simonis. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave. 718-636-4100. Dec. 6 and Dec. 8-10 at 7:30.)

BALLET HISPANICO
Tina Ramirez's troupe has Broadway glitter and ballet chops, and so does Pedro Ruiz, the charismatic Cuban-born principal (and promising choreographer) who has danced with the company for two decades. In a special farewell program on Dec. 6 (repeated at the Dec. 10 matinée), Ruiz performs two Ramón Oller dances, "Tears for Violeta" and the Gypsy-inflected "Bury Me Standing." Rounding out the bill is Ruiz's own retro-suave "Club Havana" (2000), which luxuriates in intricate, stylish partnering. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave. 212-242-0800. Dec. 6-9 at 8, Dec. 10 at 2 and 8, and Dec. 11 at 2 and 7:30.)

TABLES FOR TWO
A.O.C. BEDFORD

14 Bedford St. (212-414-4764)—A.O.C., meaning *appellation d'origine contrôlée*, is the designation that the French give to foodstuffs whose production is limited to specific regions—champagne, for example, or Camembert. While the menu at A.O.C. Bedford abounds in such ingredients, and with their Spanish equivalents, labelled D.O. for *denominación de origen*, the restaurant's name has a fussier vibe than the place itself, a snug bistro tucked away in the Village. The small room is so cozy that you expect an open fire; instead, red painted walls, patches of exposed brick, and lowish ceilings with wooden beams are suffused by candlelight.

While the cooking here is on the ambitious side, many of the most successful dishes have a hearty simplicity. A rich pumpkin soup contains thick strands of sautéed onion, and the outstanding gnocchi come in a sauce of Cabrales cheese, browned on top. A signature dish is suckling pig, a loin with succulent, crispy skin. This is one of several dishes that are plated or prepared at one's table. Such rituals can often seem perfunctory and embarrassing, but here, despite the tiny space, the staff conveys real enjoyment. But subtler flavors on the menu could sometimes be more imaginatively handled. An artichoke salad was unmemorable and a dish insouciantly billed as "Lettuce" turned out to be a straightforward Caesar salad. One exception, though, is the artful octopus-carpaccio appetizer. Consisting of delicate tentacles sliced in cross-section a few microns thick, drizzled with olive oil, and spread in a wide circle, this spectacular dish has the mottled appearance of antique marble.

Desserts vary, but it's a fair bet that there will be a tarte Tatin—the apples have a fine dark, caramelized flavor, but the pastry ought to be more delicate—and a crème brûlée that is blowtorched before one's eyes. The invariable specialty of the house, however, is a gorgeous crêpe Suzette. This, too, is prepared tableside, so that as the evening progresses, the restaurant gradually fills with the smell of butter and orange. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $20-$32.)

—*Leo Carey*

"PRONE"
In John Jasperse's latest piece, the audience participates by lying down among the three dancers. (The Kitchen, 512 W. 19th St. 212-255-5793. Dec. 6-7 at 8, Dec. 8-10 at 7 and 9, and Dec. 13 at 8. Through Dec. 17.)

SIDE ONE POSTHUME THEATRE
Pascal Rambert, the Paris-based avant-garde director of "Gilgamesh," is now concerned with the expulsion of humans—from the garden (by God), from the center of the universe (per Copernicus), and so on. Consequently, the nude innocents in Rambert's "Paradis (Unfolding Time)" are banished from center stage and forced to skirt the edges of a large mat, where they perform strange calisthenics while brandishing paper fans, crawl under blankets, and recite text into microphones. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 210 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. Dec. 7-10 at 7:30.)

"BALLETTO STILETTO"
The feisty downtown choreographer Heidi Latsky's holiday show is a party-girl adaptation of the Brothers Grimm tale "The Twelve Dancing Princesses." (La Mama E.T.C., 74A E. 4th St. 212-475-7710. Dec. 8-10 at 7:30 and Dec. 11 at 2:30 and 7:30. Through Dec. 18.)

NEW YORK THEATRE BALLET
An hour-long child-friendly version of "The Nutcracker." (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 212-307-4100. Dec. 9 at 10 A.M. and noon and Dec. 10-11 at 11 A.M., 1, and 3:30. Through Dec. 18.)

GOLDEN DRAGON ACROBATS
The troupe from Henan, China, continues its run. (New Victory Theatre, 209 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200. Dec. 9 at 7, Dec. 10 at 2 and 7, and Dec. 11 at noon and 5. Through Jan. 1.)

ADRIANE FANG AND COLLEEN THOMAS
Two consummate performers, known mostly for their participation in the companies of others (Doug Varone and Bill Young, respectively), present an evening of their own accomplished choreography, with three works each. "Alpha Damsel," the shared Danspace Project program, is rich and varied. Fang's "Roses" poses Clare Byrne as an antique portrait, stock-still for a full minute; slowly, Fang tests a tentative and precarious intimacy. The dancers in Thomas's "Taken," by contrast, shake even when they're rooted to a spot; when they move, they explode in cantilevered motion so extreme it could be supernatural possession. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 212-674-8194. Dec. 9-10 at 8:30 and Dec. 11 at 7:30.)

PAT CATTERSON
Exactly thirty-five years after her first New York performances, the seventies veteran presents a program of new work. In the triptych "Exposure," the first part puts her mostly college-age ensemble in poses taken from nineteenth-century female statues in a Parisian graveyard; the second wraps naked fifty-year-olds in towels; and the last sets a septuagenarian among fashion-magazine images. Catterson also breaks out her tap shoes for a solo, and revels in her own noisemaking. (Merce Cunningham Studio, 55 Bethune St. 212-260-1834. Dec. 9 at 9, Dec. 10 at 8, and Dec. 11 at 3.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA
Dec. 7 at 8 and Dec. 10 at 1:30: Ruth Ann Swenson (singing the role of Micaëla) and Denyce Graves (in the title role) add their star power to the ongoing revival of **"Carmen,"** with the estimable Mar-

cello Giordani as Don José and Erwin Schrott, a rising young baritone in Europe, as Escamillo; the excellent Philippe Jordan conducts. ♦ Dec. 8 and Dec. 12 at 8: The world-première performances of Tobias Picker's **"An American Tragedy,"** an opera based on the Theodore Dreiser novel, continue, featuring a gilt-edged cast that includes Patricia Racette, Susan Graham, Dolora Zajick, William Burden, and Nathan Gunn (along with Jennifer Larmore, in a cameo role). Francesca Zambello directs; James Conlon. ♦ Dec. 9 at 8: **"La Bohème,"** with Hei-Kyung Hong, Alexandra Deshorties, Roberto Aronica, and Vladimir Chernov; Philippe Auguin. ♦ Dec. 10 at 8 and Dec. 13 at 7:30: Anna Netrebko and Rolando Villazón, who in last summer's Salzburg Festival performances of "La Traviata" proved themselves the most combustible operatic duo around, take the roles of Gilda and the Duke in a revival of the grandiloquent Otto Schenk production of **"Rigoletto."** Carlo Guelfi (in the title role), Nancy Fabiola Herrera, and Eric Halfvarson round out the fine cast; Asher Fisch. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

AMATO OPERA

Anthony Amato's shoestring company, housed in a tiny old-time theatre on the Lower East Side, celebrates the holidays with its production of Lehár's **"The Merry Widow"**—sung in English, as the composer would have wanted. (Amato Opera Theatre, 319 Bowery, at 2nd St. 212-228-8200. Dec. 10 at 7:30 and Dec. 11 at 2:30. Through Jan. 8.)

HOLIDAY MUSIC

THE WAVERLY CONSORT: "THE CHRISTMAS STORY"

Every year, Michael Jaffe's medieval-music group offers a program of Christmas hymns, antiphons, and Mass settings from throughout Europe at the Cloisters museum, Upper Manhattan's authentically medieval venue. (Fort Tryon Park. 212-650-2290. Dec. 10-11 at 1 and 3.)

"MESSIAH"

You might say that Trinity Church has a Handel tradition: the composer's holiday classic (originally composed for Lent) made its New World début there in 1770, and it's been performed there every year since. Owen Burdick, using an edition based on Handel's last conducting score, directs the church's choir along with Rebel, New York's exceptional early-music group. (Broadway at Wall St. 212-279-4200. Dec. 11 at 3.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

The gentlemen singers of Frederick Renz's Early Music New York ensemble, accompanied on Renaissance instruments, perform a selection of Bohemian carols, motets, and Hussite songs (along with Machaut's immortal "Messe de Notre Dame"), amid the intimate grandeur of the Medieval Sculpture Hall. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 11 at 6:30 and 8:30.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC

Rafael Frühbeck de Burgos, a colorful European maestro of solid musicianship and conventional tastes, leads his first concert with the Philharmonic since 1970—a program including orchestral excerpts from Wagner's "Meistersinger" and "Tristan und Isolde," Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 2 (with the redoubtable André Watts), and the Suites Nos. 1 and 2 from Falla's "The Three-Cornered Hat." (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 7-8 at 7:30 and Dec. 10 at 8.)

CURTIS INSTITUTE OF MUSIC CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Jaime Laredo, a keen appraiser of young talent, brings the group up from Philadelphia for a special all-Mozart concert that will include the Sinfonia Concertante in E-Flat Major (with Laredo, on viola, and the violinist Jennifer Koh as soloists) and the Symphony No. 40. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-586-4680. Dec. 11 at 2.)

JUILLIARD ORCHESTRA

James Conlon leads the conservatory's leading ensemble (along with the Juilliard Choral Union) in Mahler's Symphony No. 3. (Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 11 at 3.)

RECITALS

"RICHARD GOODE AND FRIENDS"

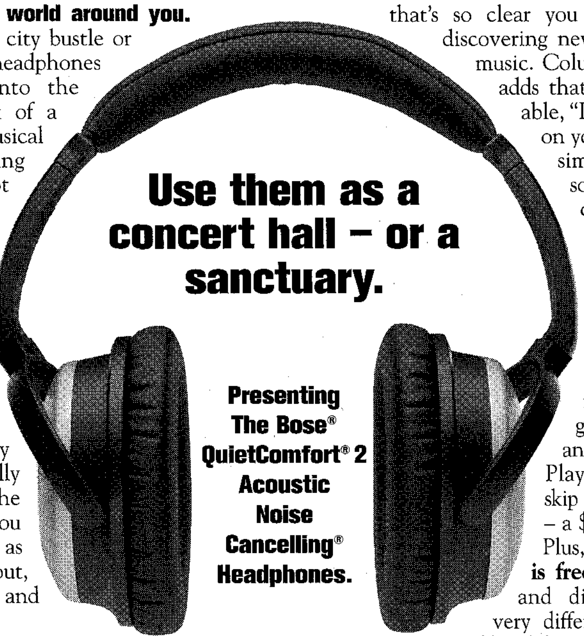
The probing American pianist offers the latest in a series of concerts at Carnegie Hall. Dec. 7 at 7:30: The soprano Dawn Upshaw, the pianist Jeffrey Kahane, the violinist Colin Jacobsen, and other musicians join Goode for Haydn's Piano Trio in E-Flat Major, Mozart's Sonata for Piano Four Hands, K. 497, and a selection of songs by both composers. (Zankel Hall.) ♦ Dec. 11 at 4: Goode goes solo to offer a lecture and concert devoted to Beethoven's Piano Sonata in A-Flat Major, Op. 110. (Weill Recital Hall.) ♦ Dec. 13 at 7:30: Beethoven's "Elegiac Song," Op. 118, adds a touch of the exotic to Goode's program with the Brentano String Quartet and the mezzo-soprano Tamara Mumford, among others, which also features the composer's Bagatelles, Op. 119, and Mozart's String Quintet in D Major and Piano Quartet in E-Flat Major. (Zankel Hall.) (212-247-7800.)

GREENWICH HOUSE: "KEYS TO THE FUTURE"

A two-concert festival concludes with three pianists (including Molly Morkowski) offering works by Andriessen, Del Tredici, Kernis, Lowell Liebermann (a New York première), and David Lang. (46 Barrow St. 212-242-4770. Dec. 8 at 8.)

"JUILLIARD YOUNG ARTISTS AND THEIR MENTORS"

The distinguished pianists Joseph Kalichstein and Brian Zeger and the Juilliard String Quartet perform music by Brahms (both versions of the Piano Quin-



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CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK
MASTER'S CHOICE

What is Alfred Hitchcock's greatest film? A large retrospective of his work, running through January 12 at Film Forum, prompts the kind of question that breaks up friendships. In recent decades, critical consensus has settled on the American movies from the fifties, especially the complex fable of voyeurism and fear "Rear Window" and the ravishingly beautiful hallucinatory nightmare "Vertigo." Hitchcock, however, often said that his own favorite was "Shadow of a Doubt," from 1943, in which a debonair murderer of widows (Joseph Cotten), who has a fully worked-out nihilistic theory of existence, settles into peaceful Santa Rosa, California. Hitchcock is perverse enough to suggest that the murderer's bitter clarity is in greater touch with life than is the feeble virtue of the town's residents. But Cotten's killer meets his match in a formidable teen-ager—his niece, played by Teresa Wright—who, instinctively decent, senses that without innocence love is not possible. "Shadow of a Doubt" may or may not be Hitchcock's greatest film, but it's his most intimate and heart-wrenching.

—David Denby

tet in F Minor), Wolf, and Mendelssohn (the Octet) with their talented students, in two separate programs. (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 9-10 at 7:30.)

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM: BEJUN MEHTA
Quite a few opera fans who came to the Met to hear last season's "Rodelinda" got a pleasant surprise in the form of Bejun Mehta, who easily held his own with the likes of Renée Fleming and David Daniels. The countertenor's next concert is at the Temple of Dendur, where he'll offer a program of songs by Mozart, Schubert, Wolf, and Finzi. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 9 at 8.)

MILLER THEATRE: "SEXTETS AND SEPTETS"
A pan-historical concert of works for strings by Gibbons, Wuorinen, Bach, and Strauss (the original version of "Metamorphosen"), played by such musicians as the violinist Jennifer Frautschi and the cellist Fred Sherry. (Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 212-854-7799. Dec. 9 at 8.)

TRIO MEDIAEVAL
The ethereal female vocal trio offers "Seinte Mari Moder Milde," a concert of works honoring the Virgin Mary, including pieces by Gavin Bryars and Isobel Davies and a selection of English and Norwegian carols. (Weill Recital Hall, Carnegie Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 10 at 7:30.)

EIGHTH BLACKBIRD
To celebrate their tenth anniversary, the feisty new-music sextet offers "Lucid, Inescapable Rhythms," a concert featuring works by Lerdahl ("Fantasy Études"), Higdon (a New York première), and Rzewski. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 10 at 8.)

CHRISTOPH PRÉGARDIEN
The German tenor, a noted singer of Classical opera and Romantic lieder, sings Schubert's "Winterreise," accompanied by Dennis Helmrich. (Alice Tully Hall. 212-721-6500. Dec. 11 at 5.)

MOVIES OPENING

BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION, THE WITCH AND THE WARDROBE
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (In wide release.)

DÍAS DE SANTIAGO
The first feature from Josué Méndez, about a young man who returns to unemployment in Lima after his military service fighting guerrillas in the Peruvian jungle. Opening Dec. 8. (Pioneer Theatre.)

EK AJNABEE
An action melodrama in which a wounded gangster (Amitabh Bachchan) rescues a kidnapped child. The title means "One Stranger." Directed by Apoorva Lakhia. In Hindi. Opening Dec. 9. (ImaginAsian.)

FALLEN
Fred Kelemen directed this drama, about a man who investigates a suicide that may not have occurred. In Latvian and Russian. Opening Dec. 9. (Anthology Film Archives.)

ISN'T THIS A TIME!
Pete Seeger, Peter, Paul, and Mary, Arlo Guthrie, the Weavers, and other folk musicians perform at a 2003 concert in honor of the impresario Harold Leventhal. Directed by Jim Brown. Opening Dec. 9. (Quad Cinema.)

MAREBITO
A cameraman curious about a suicide on a Tokyo metro discovers an alternate world of ghosts and robots. Directed by Takashi Shimizu ("Ju-On" and "The Grudge"). In Japanese. Opening Dec. 9. (Angelika Film Center.)

MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA
Rob Marshall directed this adaptation of Arthur Golden's novel, with Ziyi Zhang in the lead role. With Ken Watanabe and Michelle Yeoh. Opening Dec. 9. (In wide release.)

MRS. HENDERSON PRESENTS
Based on the true story of the socialite impresario Laura Henderson (Judi Dench), who shocked wartime London by sponsoring nude theatricals. With Bob Hoskins and Christopher Guest. Directed by Stephen Frears. Opening Dec. 9. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

THE POWER OF NIGHTMARES
Adam Curtis directed this documentary, which calls into question the notion of an international terrorist conspiracy. Opening Dec. 9. (Cinema Village.)

THE WORLD'S FASTEST INDIAN
The sentimental tale of Burt Munro (Anthony Hopkins), who spent years trying to break the land-speed record on his motorcycle. Directed by Roger Donaldson. Opening Dec. 9. (Cinemas 1, 2, and 3 and Sunshine Cinema.)

NOW PLAYING

BEE SEASON
Young Eliza Naumann (Flora Cross) is a champion speller. This is a source of warm satisfaction to her father (Richard Gere), who not only thrums with ambition for his children but also, as a Kabbalistic scholar, asserts that words can grant access to the divine—a theory that is less likely to be embraced by anybody listening to the script of this movie. Eliza has a brother (Max Minghella) who is shopping around for religious experience, and a mother (Juliette Binoche) whose kleptomaniac leanings point to a calamity in her past. All in all, a happy California family, and if you expect to get a laugh, or even a fleeting smile, out of their wide range of dysfunctions, think again. Every tremor is treated with a frowning solemnity, and only the haunted performances of the two younger actors keep the movie alive. The spelling bees in which Eliza competes are drained of all drama by the floating, phantasmagoric style that is favored by the directors, Scott McGehee and David Siegel. Previously, they enjoyed some success with "The Deep End." This time, regrettably, they have moved to the other end of the pool.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/14/05.) (In wide release.)

BE HERE TO LOVE ME
The Texan singer and composer Townes Van Zandt died in 1997. Long before his death, he had—without trying, or even noticing—created something of a cult. That is seldom an enviable status, and Margaret Brown's wise documentary scorns the cultish approach, preferring to level a sympathetic gaze at the broken figure that Van Zandt used to cut, and to listen calmly to the sadness that he left in his wake. Through a blend of photographs and aging footage, we watch the lanky boy grow taller but never wider, and learn with horror of the electric-shock treatment administered to him in his youth. Ever after, there was something stunned in his demeanor, and much of the movie's fascination rises from the gulf between the drug-dosed wildcat of legend—the guy with the shotgun and the bottle of booze—and the serene, low-voiced charmer who muses to the camera and performs his wrenching songs in a croon not far from a cry. We get some twenty-five songs in all, plus testimony from Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson, the benignly indiscreet Guy Clark, and Emmylou Harris (who gives every sign of being immortal). Brown conceived her movie, she says, to be "vinyl, not CD," and the ride of it does indeed deliver a rough-edged truth.—*A.L.* (Angelika Film Center.)

THE BOYS OF BARAKA
In this closely observed documentary, Heidi Ewing and Rachel Grady follow four sweet, disruptive twelve- and thirteen-year-old boys who are chosen to leave the chaos of Baltimore's ineffectual public schools for an experimental program at the Baraka School, in Kenya. Their isolated existence in the vast, arid bush and the consistent attention of their new teachers baffle them into working hard, and even the most pugilistic soon see the wisdom of just doing what the teacher says. The school closes for security reasons, truncating their story, but poignant follow-up scenes reveal the bittersweet transformation of these wild, smart boys into mature young men who know what they're missing out on and how far they have to go.—*Shauna Lyon* (Film Forum.)

BREAKFAST ON PLUTO
Patrick (Kitten) Braden (Cillian Murphy), an Irish foundling, grows up gay and glam in long hair and

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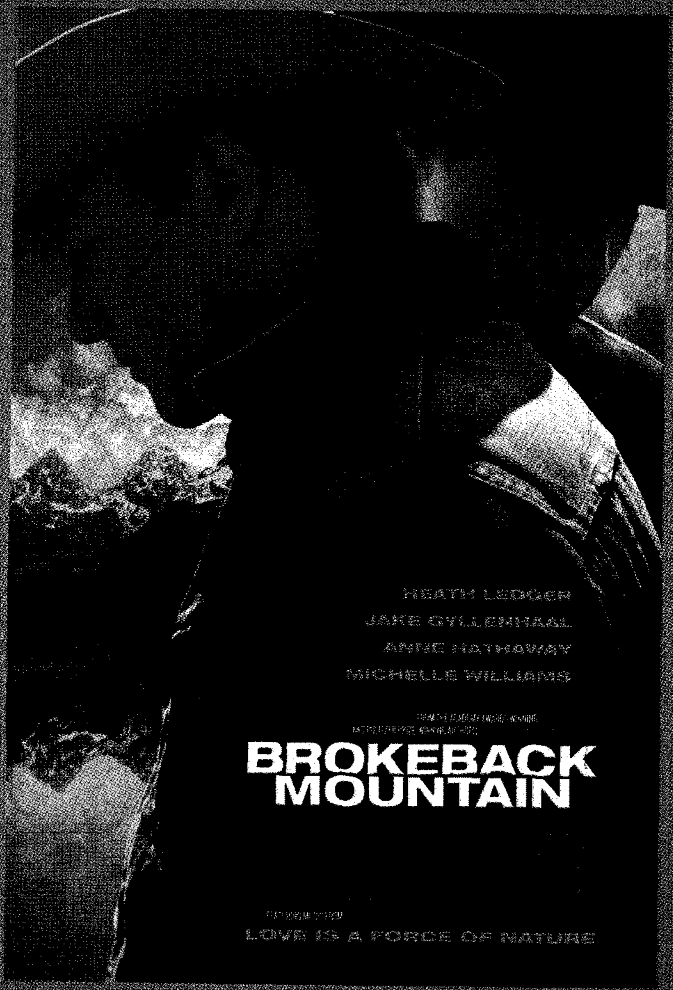

From Academy Award-winning filmmaker Ang Lee comes an epic American love story, *Brokeback Mountain*, the winner of the Golden Lion Award for Best Picture at this year's Venice International Film Festival. Based on the short story by Pulitzer Prize-winning author Annie Proulx and adapted for the screen by Larry McMurtry and Diana Ossana, this extraordinary film stars Heath Ledger, Jake Gyllenhaal, Anne Hathaway and Michelle Williams. After its rapturous receptions at the Venice, Telluride and Toronto Film Festivals, it stands as the holiday season's most highly anticipated and talked about film.

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FOCUS
FEATURES

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dresses. He leaves his small town, falls in love with an I.R.A. gunrunner, looks for his mother in London, where he becomes a prostitute, and gets accused of blowing up a disco. Neil Jordan's latest, from a screenplay by Pat McCabe (adapting his own novel), is a picaresque—the Progress of a Cross-Dresser. The movie has an exceptional sweetness: Murphy, with his ripe lips and big baby blues, makes Patrick a love. Jordan displays his poetic resourcefulness as a filmmaker, but Patrick, it turns out, just wants a lap to crawl into, and his quest isn't very interesting. With Stephen Rea as a magician and Liam Neeson as a priest who yields to temptation.—*David Denby* (In wide release.)

CITY OF SADNESS

This vastly ambitious drama about political strife in Taiwan, from the island's liberation from Japan, in 1945, to the Communist takeover of China, in 1949, distills this timespan into intimate sketches. The director, Hou Hsiao-hsien, builds his film around a single focal episode—the killing, in 1947, by the ruling Nationalists, of tens of thousands of their political opponents—through the story of Wen-ching (Tony Leung), a deaf-mute portrait photographer, whose silent lucidity is an ironic critique of the post-liberation linguistic wars that mirrored Taiwan's civil conflict. Hou's extraordinarily controlled and well-constructed scenes, which he films in long takes, have a crystalline coherence: his favorite trope is to shoot through doorways, as if keeping his characters at a dignified, impassable remove. If the film's power ultimately washes out against its broad narrative, the lasting impression is nonetheless of a director's intensely personal struggle at the crossroads of large-scale history and private memory. Released in 1989. In Taiwanese, Mandarin, Japanese, Cantonese, and Shanghainese.—*Richard Brody* (BAM Rose Cinemas; Dec. 11.)

DON QUIJOTE DE ORSON WELLES

Orson Welles's unfinished "Don Quixote," begun in the nineteen-fifties, is set in a modernity with which the self-dubbed knight-errant (Francisco Reiguera) is painfully out of touch: he tilts at a Vespa that he thinks is carrying a woman off against her will. This assemblage of Welles's footage by Jess Franco, from 1992, is crude, gappy, and slapdash, but it hardly matters: the pathos of Welles's thinly veiled self-portrait is almost unbearable. Welles himself was a quixotic figure who so loved fiction that he wandered the world in quest of unwinnable battles—of which this film is one.—*R.B.* (Walter Reade Theatre; Dec. 11.)

HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

Puberty is never a pretty sight, but you have to say this for it: it doesn't let wizards off the hook. Harry Potter (Daniel Radcliffe) and his friend Ron (Rupert Grint), now in their early teens, are beset by the same vocal and emotional mayhem as their real-life equivalents. Hermione (Emma Watson) shows preternatural aplomb, but then she has been forty since the age of ten. Their pleasant existence at Hogwarts is disrupted by the arrival of two rival schools; each must furnish a contestant for the Triwizard Tournament, which is meant to demonstrate courage but actually resembles the lower strain of Japanese game show. The resulting tale is less tangled than its predecessors; the director, Mike Newell, has a surer sense of pace and a better handle on the bafflements of boarding-school life. He is stuck, however, with the grandiose requirements of the Potter franchise, which deems that every installment should rise to a final joust between good and evil, whether we like it or not. In short, the magic of Harry, on its fourth outing, is starting to wear thin. With Brendan Gleeson, who enjoys himself hugely as a rolling-eyed defender against the dark arts.—*A.L.* (11/28/05) (In wide release.)

THE ICE HARVEST

Harold Ramis's latest film, co-written by Robert Benton and Richard Russo, is an example of the disaster that may result when smart people try to make a crass movie. John Cusack is a low-life lawyer in Wichita; Billy Bob Thornton is his partner, the owner of a strip joint; Connie Nielsen, made up like a nineteen-forties femme fatale, is the slinky, mysterious broad whom Cusack lusts after. The boys skim two million dollars from the illegal holdings of a local Mr. Big (Randy Quaid), but the plot, in which everyone betrays everyone, is extraordinarily vague. The movie takes place on a dreadfully rainy Christmas Eve and features an anti-seasonal whiff of tawdry deals and cynical violence, all of it spiced with a peculiar patois that sounds like Mickey Spillane talking dirtier than he could have got away with fifty years ago. Oliver Platt has some good bits as a respectable man who gets wildly drunk, but otherwise the entire movie feels like slumming.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

IN THE MIX

Modern America has three main stories—race, family, and the Family—and all three are brought together in this appealingly straightforward, if formulaic, comic romance. Darrell (Usher), a college-educated d.j., takes a bullet for a sweet-tempered Mafia don, Frank Pacelli (Chazz Palminteri), who hires him as the bodyguard for his law-student daughter, Dolly (Emmanuelle Chriqui). Usher is a charming, hearty presence, and Chriqui, refreshingly avoiding Joisey caricature, offers a sly wink and a forthright manner. Like classic-era studio fare, the film is all foreground—the director, Ron Underwood, and the writer, Jacqueline Zambrano, openly reference the Billy Wilder canon—and its situations are handled with the right dose of understated sentiment. It may lack a sense of place and a sense of style, but its unforced ordinariness makes it seem unusual.—*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Ziyi Zhang in "Memoirs of a Geisha," directed by Rob Marshall, opening Dec. 9.

ZOHAR LAZAR

THE LIBERTINE

Johnny Depp, who has made his name with misfits, outsiders, and untrammelled wackos, now turns his attention to John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester—the scourge of seventeenth-century London, and by some distance the wickedest poet in the language. Depp plays him as a *poète maudit*: a self-loathing paleface, loitering in a dirt-brown twilight of his own devising. He's not entirely wrong, but one longs for Rochester the charmer—the gallant, devouring hooligan whose tongue and verse alike could charm the pants off anyone he pleased. The heart of the film is his conquest of Elizabeth Barry (Samantha Morton), the actress who, under his tutelage, became the mistress not just of the London stage but of many of the grandees who frequented it. There is expert assistance from Rosamund Pike, in the role of Rochester's long-suffering wife, but other performers have a bored and bewildered air—and who can blame them, when the director, Laurence Dunmore, seems determined to drown them in a universal murk? With John Malkovich, plus nose, as Charles II.—*A.L.* (11/28/05) (Angelika Film Center.)

SYRIANA

Steven Gaghan's tense, outrageously complicated thriller—a major film but not a great one—is about oil, a corrupted C.I.A. that strong-arms for the oil companies, and the politics of the Middle East. The principal players are a large Houston-based oil concern and its Washington law firm; an emirate in the Gulf; an aging C.I.A. field operative (George Clooney); an industry analyst (Matt Damon) based in Europe; a couple of Pakistani oil workers who lose their jobs and wind up in a madrassa; and assorted terrorists, cynical bureaucrats, and bullying legal and corporate types. There is no real protagonist—or, rather, the protagonist is the oil business itself, which gets people killed, tortured, blown up, thrown on the junk heap. Gaghan constructs short, bristling scenes that often end abruptly with nasty implications hanging in the air. He hops all over the globe, and his method makes it impossible to develop anything in depth (you really have to see this movie twice in order to fully see it once), but he has a sharp tongue, moral urgency, and an amazingly fluent way with actors. With Christopher Plummer, Jeffrey Wright, Amanda Peet, and many, many others.—*D.D.* (In wide release.)

WALK THE LINE

Joaquin Phoenix, with deep-set blue eyes, a long chin, and a scarred lip, is Johnny Cash; Reese Witherspoon, bouncy and smart, with long black tresses, is his beloved June Carter, of the country-singing Carter clan. Phoenix slings his guitar around and guns it at the audience in Cash's shambling style; his singing wavers in pitch, but, all in all, it's not bad. This bio-pic, covering Cash's youth and early manhood, written by James Mangold and Gill Dennis and directed by Mangold, is very pleasant but too conventionally conceived. Phoenix looks at times as if he wanted to kill someone, but the filmmakers haven't written anything interesting for him to say, and most of the time Cash comes off as furtive, weak, and lost. As June stares directly at Cash's weaknesses and nails him every time, "Walk the Line" becomes a kind of moralizing romantic comedy, in which he struggles to be a man worthy of her love and she struggles against her desire to have him. The picture offers some sidelong glances at life on the road in the convulsive 1955-56 period, in which country, R. & B., and nascent rock were all sloshing around together. With Robert Patrick as Cash's dead-eyed father and Vivian Loberto as his first wife, who nags at him and wants him to stay home with her and the kids.—*D.D.* (11/21/05) (In wide release.)

Also Playing

CAPOTE: In wide release (10/10/05). **FAR SIDE OF THE MOON:** Angelika Film Center. **GOOD NIGHT, AND GOOD LUCK:** In wide release (10/10/05). **MRS. PALFREY AT THE CLAREMONT:** Paris. **THE SQUID AND THE WHALE:** Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas (10/24/05).

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (212-505-5181)—"New-Filmmakers Presents." Dec. 7 at 7: Short-film program. ♦ Dec. 7 at 8: "Luscious Johnny: The Wrestler" (2003, Nick Oddo). ♦ Anthology celebrates its thirty-fifth anniversary with guest-curated programs. All programs are free to the public. Dec. 9 at 8: "The Rules of the Game" (1939, Jean Renoir; in French), selected and introduced by Peter Bogdanovich. ♦ Dec. 10 at 8: "Au Hasard Balthazar" (1966, Robert Bresson; in French), selected and introduced by Patti Smith. ♦ Dec. 11 at 8: "Flaming Creatures" (1963, Jack Smith) and "Pull My Daisy" (1959, Robert Frank and Alfred Leslie), selected and introduced by Christine Vachon.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4100)—"Cinemachat with Elliot Stein." Dec. 7 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:30: "Kiss Me Deadly" (1955, Robert Aldrich); the 6:50 screening is followed by a discussion with Stein and the actress Gaby Rodgers. ♦ "In Memoriam: John Lennon." Dec. 8 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "How I Won the War" (1967, Richard Lester). ♦ Through Dec. 18: "Hard Boiled and in the Mood: Tony Leung." Dec. 9 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Magic Crane" (1993, Benny Chan; in Cantonese). ♦ Dec. 10 at 3, 6, and 9: "Hard Boiled" (1992, John Woo; in Cantonese). ♦ Dec. 11 at 2, 5:15, and 8:30: "City of Sadness" (†). ♦ Through Dec. 20: "A Popular Cinema: Nelson Pereira dos Santos." All films are in Portuguese. Dec. 12 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "Vidas Secas" (1963). ♦ Dec. 13 at 4:30, 6:50, and 9:15: "The Amulet of Ogum" (1974).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (212-727-8110)—In revival. Dec. 7-8 at 1:10, 3:15, 5:20, 7:30, and 9:40: "Paths of Glory" (1957, Stanley Kubrick). ♦ Through Jan. 12: "Essential Hitchcock." Dec. 9-11 at 1, 3:15, 5:30, 7:45, and 10 and Dec. 12 at 1 and 3:15: "Rear Window" (1954). ♦ Dec. 12 at 5:30 and 9:30: "Blackmail" (1929). ♦ Dec. 12 at 7:40: "The Lodger" (1926; silent). ♦ Dec. 13 at 1, 4:40, and 8:20: "Sabotage" (1936). ♦ Dec. 13 at 2:35, 6:15, and 9:55: "Saboteur" (1942).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL
55 E. 59th St. (212-355-6160)—Through Dec. 20: "La Jeunesse, Vite! Young French Cinema 1959-1968." All films are in French. Dec. 13 at 12:30, 3:30, and 6:30: "Santa Claus Has Blue Eyes" (1966, Jean Eustache) and "Brigitte and Brigitte" (1966, Luc Moullet). ♦ Dec. 13 at 9: "Paris Belongs to Us" (1960, Jacques Rivette).

IFC CENTER
323 Sixth Ave., at W. 3rd St. (212-924-7771)—"Waverly Midnights." Dec. 9-10: "The Last Waltz" (1978, Martin Scorsese). ♦ "Weekend Classics." Dec. 9-11 at noon: "Beware of a Holy Whore" (1971, Rainer Werner Fassbinder; in German, English, French, and Spanish).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (212-708-9480)—Through Dec. 22: "Bright Stars, Big City: Chinese Cinema's First Golden Era, 1922-1937." Except where noted, all films are silent with English intertitles or simultaneous translation. Dec. 7 at 6:30: "Love and Duty" (1931, Bu Wancang). ♦ Dec. 8 at 6: "Street Angel" (1937, Yuan Muzhi; in Mandarin). ♦ Dec. 8 at 8: "Queen of Sports" (1934, Sun Yu). ♦ Dec. 9 at 7:15: "Two Stars" (1931, Shi Dongshan). ♦ Dec. 9 at 8:30: "Coming Home" (1934, Zhu Shilin). ♦ Dec. 10 at 4:30: "The Goddess" (1934, Wu Yonggang). ♦ Dec. 10 at 6:30: "National Style" (1935, Luo Mingyou and Zhu). ♦ Dec. 10 at 8:45: "Swordswoman of Huangjiang, VI" (1931, Chen Kengran and Shangguan Wu) and excerpts from "The Red Lotus Temple" (1928-31, Zhang Sichuan). ♦ Dec. 11 at 2: "The Pearl Necklace" (1926, Li Zeyuan). ♦ Dec. 11 at 4:30: "Pink Dream" (1932, Cai Chusheng). ♦ Dec. 12 at 6: "Amorous History of the Silver Screen II" (1931, Cheng Bugao). ♦ Through Dec. 31: "Maysles Films: Five Decades." Dec. 7 at 6:30: "Lalee's Kin: The Legacy of Cotton" (2000). ♦ "World AIDS Day." Screenings in memory of Robert Beers. Dec. 7 at 8:15: "Ordet" (1954, Carl Theodor Dreyer; in Danish). ♦ A series of films featuring the actress Laura Morante. Dec. 8 at 6 and Dec. 9 at 9: "A Journey Called Love" (2002, Michele Placido; in Italian). The Dec. 8 screening will be followed by a discussion with Morante. ♦ Dec. 8 at 8:30: "The Son's Room" (2001, Nanni Moretti; in Italian). ♦ Dec. 9 at 6 and Dec. 10 at 2: "Remember Me" (2003, Gabriele Muccino; in Italian). ♦ Dec. 10 at 5:45: "The Dancer Upstairs" (2002, John Malkovich; in English, Spanish, and Quechua). ♦ "Early Autumn: Masterworks of Japanese Cinema from the National Film Center, Tokyo." All films are in Japanese. Dec. 10 at 1: "Contemporary Tales of Chivalry" (1965, Kiyoshi Saeki). ♦ Dec. 10 at 3: "The Horse" (1941, Kajiro Yamamoto). ♦ Dec. 10 at 8:30: "Woman in the Dunes" (1964, Hiroshi Teshigahara). ♦ Dec. 11 at 2: "Where Spring Comes Late" (1970, Yoji Yamada). ♦ Dec. 11 at 4:30 and Dec. 12 at 6: "The Island" (1960, Kaneto Shindo). ♦ Dec. 12 at 8: "Gate of Hell" (1953, Teinosuke Kinugasa).

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—"Digital Play Goes to the Movies." Dec. 9 at 7:30: "Death Race 2000" (1975, Paul Bartel). ♦ "Laurel and Hardy." Dec. 10 at 2: "Ontic Antics." Using two analytic projectors, Ken Jacobs performs a live reinterpretation of footage featuring Laurel and Hardy. ♦ Dec. 10 at 4:30 and Dec. 11 at 4: "Pardon Us" (1931, James Parrott) and "The Hoose-Gow" (1929, Parrott). ♦ Dec. 11 at 2: "Swiss Miss" (1938, John Blystone) and "Below Zero" (1930, Parrott). ♦ Repertory nights. Dec. 10-11 at 6:30: "Touch of Evil" (1958, Orson Welles). ♦ Off-site event, at the Paris: "An Evening with Tommy Lee Jones." Dec. 12 at 6:30: A preview screening of "The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada" (2005, Jones), followed by a discussion with the director. (For information, call 718-784-4520.)

PIONEER CINEMA
155 E. 3rd St. (212-254-3300)—"Bizarro Mondays." Dec. 12 at 6:30: "Jason and the Argonauts" (1963, Don Chaffey).

SUNSHINE CINEMA
143 E. Houston St. (212-330-8182)—"Sunshine@Midnight." Dec. 9-10: "Clue" (1985, Jonathan Lynn).

THALIA THEATRE
Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. (212-864-5400)—"Thalia Film Currents." Dec. 11 at 4 and Dec. 13 at 9:30: "Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress" (2002, Sijie Dai; in Mandarin and French). ♦ "Thalia Film Classics." Dec. 11 at 7 and Dec. 13 at 6: "The Seven Samurai" (1954, Akira Kurosawa; in Japanese).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (212-875-5600)—"Hard Questions: The Films of Amos Gitai." All films are in Hebrew, except where noted. Dec. 7 at 1:45: "Kadosh"

DVD NOTES
THE YEAR'S BEST BOXES

"The Complete Monty Python's Flying Circus 16-Ton Megaset" (A & E): True fans will tell you that it's always the year of the Python, but this past one has been especially fertile, thanks to the success of "Spamalot" on Broadway and to the release of this set, which includes all forty-five episodes of the troupe's television show and the famous live performance at the Hollywood Bowl, from 1982. Expect silly walks, dead parrots, and copious amounts of unconvincing cross-dressing.

"The Joan Crawford Collection" (Warner): During the thirties, Crawford was the queen of M-G-M, but her reputation dwindled and in 1943 she left the studio. Within days, she was signed to Warner Bros., where she would make several classic films, including "Mildred Pierce," from 1945, in which she played against type as a magnanimous matriarch, a role for which she won her only Oscar, and "Possessed," from 1947, in which she took on the role of a mentally ill woman retracing a doomed love affair. The set contains five films in all and various documentary extras.

"Alfred Hitchcock Presents: Season One" (Universal): The master of the thriller came to television in 1955, lending his name and voice to a weekly half-hour series—and even directing four of the first season's episodes. They include the opener, the sexy, sordid "Revenge," which stars Ralph Meeker and Vera Miles and is a warmup for the 1956 film "The Wrong Man." If the television shows seem like appetizers, there's always the trencherman-sized "Alfred Hitchcock: The Masterpiece Collection" (Universal), which collects fourteen of his best-known features.

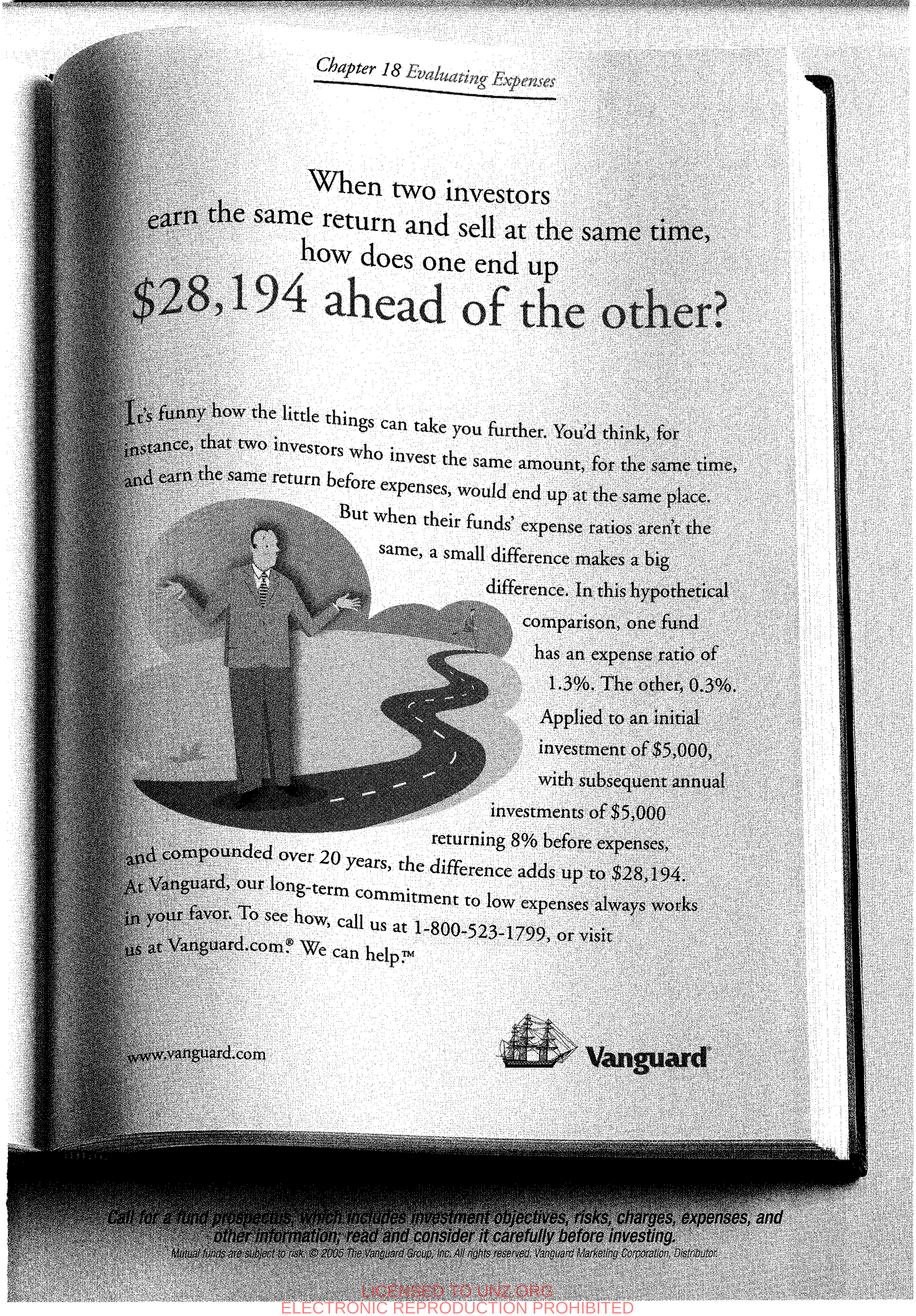
"The Harold Lloyd Comedy Collection Vols. 1-3" (New Line): Harold Lloyd was the most dead-center of the great silent comedians: he not only flourished in the age of Calvin Coolidge, he belonged to it. This seven-disk set offers all of Lloyd's silent features, including "Speedy," from 1928, with Lloyd as a baseball-crazed cabdriver who takes Babe Ruth on a death-defying hurtle through midtown Manhattan to Yankee Stadium. The box also includes many of Lloyd's silent short films, several sound films, an assortment of documentaries, and such odd effluvia as 3-D photographs by Lloyd himself and the glasses to view them.

"The King Kong Collection" (Warner): As Peter Jackson's remake lumbers toward theatres, the original 1933 "King Kong" has been given the royal treatment in this four-disk set, which includes crisp new transfers of the film and its two sequels ("Son of Kong," from later that same year, and the lighter, later "Mighty Joe Young," from 1949), along with a disk packed with documentary featurettes about the phenomenon. Jackson himself even participates, refilming the legendary lost "spider-pit" sequence.

"Jerry Lewis: The 'Legendary Jerry' Collection" (Paramount): As the French have known for years, Lewis is both a comic force of nature and an astoundingly expressive filmmaker. This ten-disk box features most of Lewis's sixties classics, including the primordial "The Nutty Professor" and "The Bellboy," Lewis's first film as director, from 1960, in which he plays both himself and a Miami hotel schlepper. And Lewis's commentary is surprisingly sharp.

"The Wizard of Oz (Three-Disk Collector's Edition)" (Warner): The first entry in this set is the sentimental favorite itself, in a richly saturated Technicolor restoration. The second disk offers an enlightening 1990 documentary, "The Making of a Movie Classic," which includes a musical number by Busby Berkeley featuring Dorothy and the Scarecrow that was left behind in the cutting-room. The third disk contains a 1914 silent version of an Emerald City story produced by L. Frank Baum himself.

"Classic Comedies Collection" (Warner): Hays Code, Shmays Code: this six-film box features Howard Hawks's 1938 screwball comedy, "Bringing Up Baby," in which a paleontologist (Cary Grant) is unable to marry a certain Miss Swallow because he has lost his bone—specifically, a dinosaur's "intercostal clavicle"—to a dog that belongs to a smitten socialite (Katharine Hepburn). Breathlessly hectic, the film deserves its full disk of background material. Another highlight is Ernst Lubitsch's wartime comedy "To Be or Not to Be," in which a Warsaw theatrical troupe (which, like the film, stars Jack Benny and Carole Lombard) tries to outwit the German invaders by impersonating them.



Chapter 18 Evaluating Expenses

When two investors earn the same return and sell at the same time, how does one end up $28,194 ahead of the other?

It's funny how the little things can take you further. You'd think, for instance, that two investors who invest the same amount, for the same time, and earn the same return before expenses, would end up at the same place. But when their funds' expense ratios aren't the same, a small difference makes a big difference. In this hypothetical comparison, one fund has an expense ratio of 1.3%. The other, 0.3%. Applied to an initial investment of $5,000, with subsequent annual investments of $5,000 returning 8% before expenses, and compounded over 20 years, the difference adds up to $28,194. At Vanguard, our long-term commitment to low expenses always works in your favor. To see how, call us at 1-800-523-1799, or visit us at Vanguard.com.® We can help.™

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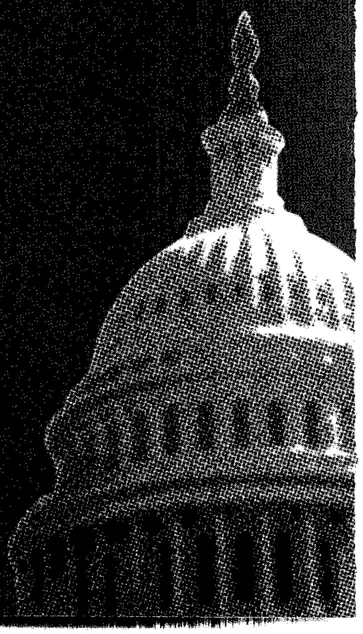
AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL USA



(1999). ♦ Dec. 7 at 4: "Kippur" (2000). ♦ Dec. 8 at 2: "Kedma" (2002; in Hebrew, Arabic, German, Polish, Russian, and Yiddish). ♦ Dec. 8 at 4: "Alila" (2003). ♦ "Spanish Cinema Now." All films are in Spanish, except where noted. Dec. 9 at 2 and 6:30 and Dec. 11 at 3:30: "Obaba" (2005, Montxo Armendáriz). ♦ Dec. 9 at 4:15, Dec. 10 at 9:15, and Dec. 13 at 3: "El Calentito" (2005, Chus Gutiérrez). ♦ Dec. 9 at 9, Dec. 10 at 6:45, and Dec. 12 at 1: "Havana Blues" (2004, Benito Zambrano). ♦ Dec. 10 at 1:30, Dec. 11 at 8:15, and Dec. 12 at 3:15: "Camarón" (2005, Jaime Chávarri). ♦ Dec. 10 at 4:15: "Hard Times" (2005, Manuel Martín Cuenca). ♦ Dec. 11 at 1: "Don Quijote de Orson Welles" (†). ♦ Dec. 11 at 6 and Dec. 13 at 1: "Idiot Love" (2004, Ventura Pons; in Spanish and Catalan). ♦ "An Evening with Ralph Fiennes." Dec. 12 at 6: "The Constant Gardener" (2005, Fernando Meirelles), followed by a discussion with Fiennes. ♦ Dec. 12 at 9:30: "The End of the Affair" (1999, Neil Jordan).

READINGS AND TALKS

IAN WILLIAMS
Williams, a correspondent for *The Nation*, reads from his latest book, "Rum: A Social and Sociable History of the Real Spirit of 1776." (Rocky Sullivan's Pub, 129 Lexington Ave., between 28th and 29th Sts. No tickets necessary. Dec. 7 at 8.)

THE POETRY PROJECT
Ron Padgett, Anne Waldman, Tony Towle, Charles North, and many other writers celebrate the publication of two new collections by the late Kenneth Koch: his collected poems and his collected fiction. (St. Mark's In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. Tickets at the door. Dec. 7 at 8.)

"PICTURING ATROCITY"
This daylong conference addressing the role of photography in today's news environment features Elisabeth Biondi, the visuals editor for this magazine, and Philip Gourevitch, a *New Yorker* writer and the author of "We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda," among other photojournalists, writers, and academics. (The Graduate Center, City University of New York, Fifth Ave. at 34th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 9, starting at 9:30 A.M.)

"SIX CONTINENTS, SIX STORIES"
The actors Marian Seldes, Amanda Plummer, Tammy Grimes, Jim Dale, Betsy Von Furstenberg, and Bess Rous read stories from around the globe. (Saint Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 9 at 12:30.)

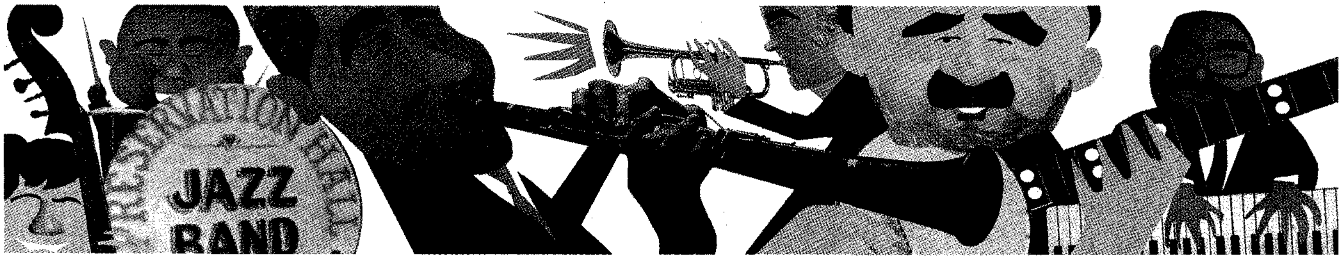
"A CHRISTMAS CAROL"
D.j.s from the classical-music station WQXR read Dickens's holiday tale. (Strand Bookstore, Broadway at 12th St. No tickets necessary. Dec. 10 at 3.)

BEHZAD YAGHMAIAN
The Iranian-American political economist discusses his latest book, "Embracing the Infidel: Stories of Muslim Migrants on the Journey West." (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 212-874-5310, ext. 144. Dec. 11 at 11:30 A.M.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

HOLIDAY RECORD AND CD SALE
The ARChive of Contemporary Music, the world's largest nonprofit archive, music library, and research center (with more than two million sound recordings), is having its annual holiday record and CD sale through Dec. 11. Twenty thousand CDs and LPs of classic rock, vintage punk, world music, and soundtracks are available, including collectible albums by the likes of Nick Cave, the Velvet Underground, Steve Reich, Eric Dolphy, and Shuggie Otis, and a copy of "Saturday Night Fever" signed by John Travolta. There's also an "Astroturf Yardsale" of vintage clothing, kitchenware, and kung-fu movies. (54 White St. For more information, call 212-226-6967 or visit www.arcmusic.org.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES
An extravagant round of year-end auctions continues at **Sotheby's,** with a session devoted to antiquities on Dec. 7; a relic of a more contemporary provenance—one of Joe DiMaggio's two No. 9 home uniforms, from his rookie year, 1936—will be the highlight of the sports-memorabilia sale on Dec. 10. A selection of jewels by the Art Nouveau titan René Lalique, from a private collection, will be offered between Sessions Two and Three of an auction of jewelry, on Dec. 8; design rules on Dec. 9-10, with a full range of twentieth-century pieces offered on the first day and a Stickley-rich sale of American furniture and decorative objects on the second. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) ♦ **Christie's** sale of antiquities on Dec. 9 is formidable, capped by the auction of an oversized bronze head of the Roman emperor Antoninus Pius (expected to bring up to one and a half million dollars). Also on the schedule are auctions of design on Dec. 7 and of sporting art on Dec. 8, with a range of jewelry, ancient and otherwise, offered on Dec. 8 and Dec. 13, respectively. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) ♦ **Swann** moves forward with a significant sale of maps and atlases from the collection of Mark Babinski on Dec. 8, including maps of the early United States by John Melish, Henry Schenck Tanner, and other notables. (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.)



STEPHEN KRONINGER

ON THE HORIZON

NIGHT LIFE
ORLEANS TO GO
Dec. 27-31

When Hurricane Katrina forced the closing of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band's French Quarter home, the band took to the road. They've since played throughout Europe and Asia. They ring in the New Year at the Jazz Standard. (212-576-2232.)

MOVIES
CINEMA, SHE WROTE
Jan. 3-Feb. 28

As part of a tribute to Marguerite Duras on the tenth anniversary of her death, the Alliance Française presents "To Murder the Cinema," featuring seven of the nineteen films that she directed, including "Nathalie Granger," from 1972, which Duras made in and around her own home, with Jeanne Moreau, Lucia Bosé, and a young Gérard Depardieu as a door-to-door washing-machine salesman. (212-355-6100.)

THE THEATRE
THE VERY MODEL
Jan. 6-15

The beloved and dependable New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players kick off the 2006 season with the class satire "H.M.S. Pinafore," which has been an enduring hit since its opening, in May, 1878. The company will also perform "The Mikado" and, for one night only, "Quintessential G & S!," a pageant of highlights from its repertory. (212-581-1212.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC
HELLO BERLIN
Jan. 25-28

The New York première of Thomas Adès's "Asyla" is a highlight of Simon Rattle's four concerts with the Berlin Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall, which will also feature the charismatic maestro conducting works by Mozart, Schoenberg, Strauss, and Mahler (the Fourth Symphony, with the mezzo-soprano Magdalena Kožená). (212-247-7800.)

ART
MACHINE AGE
Feb. 3-May 14

The Guggenheim is celebrating the hundredth birthday of the American sculptor David Smith (1906-65) with a centennial exhibition of a hundred and twenty sculptures by the master of welded metal, dating from 1932 to 1965. (212-423-3500.)

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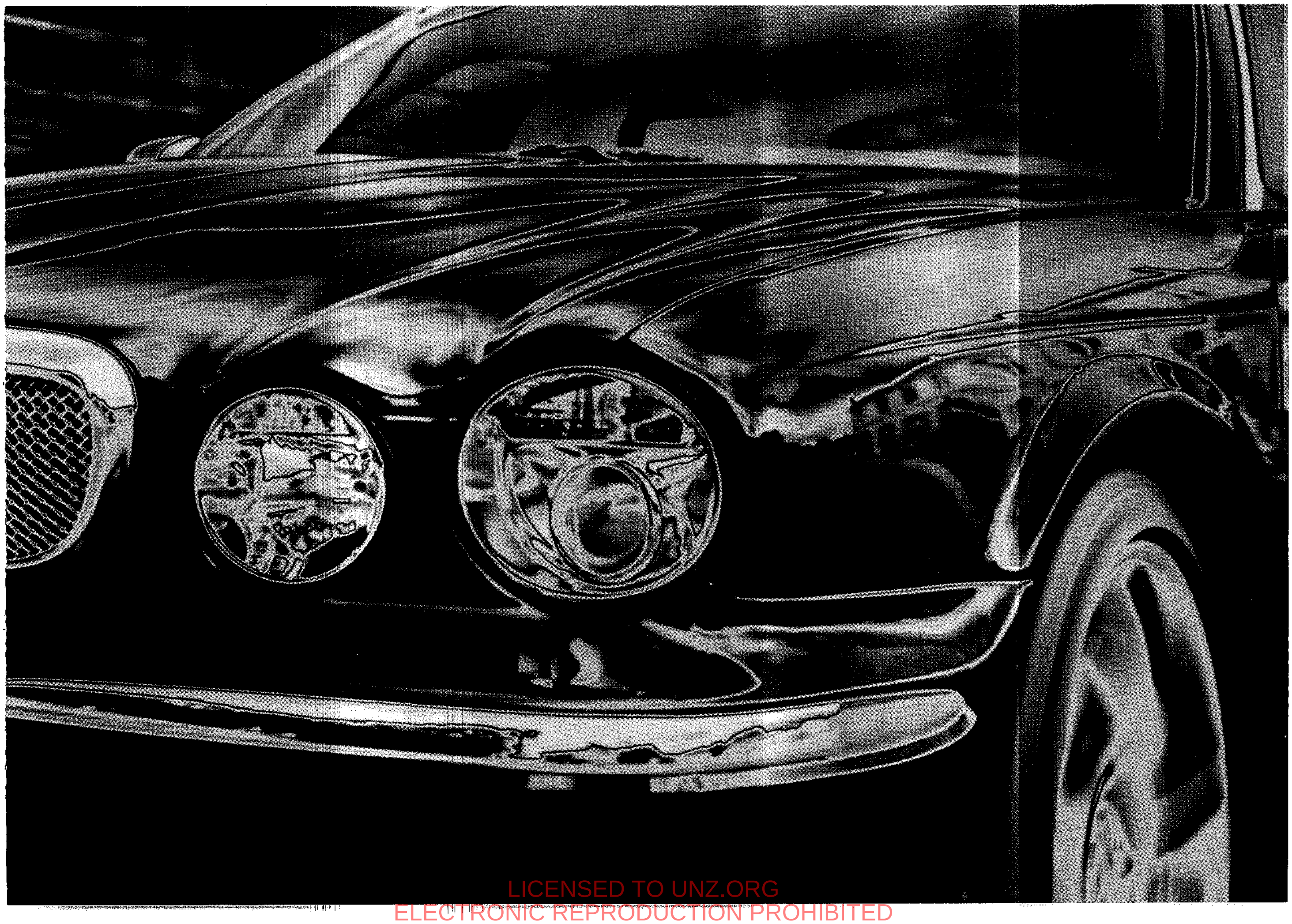

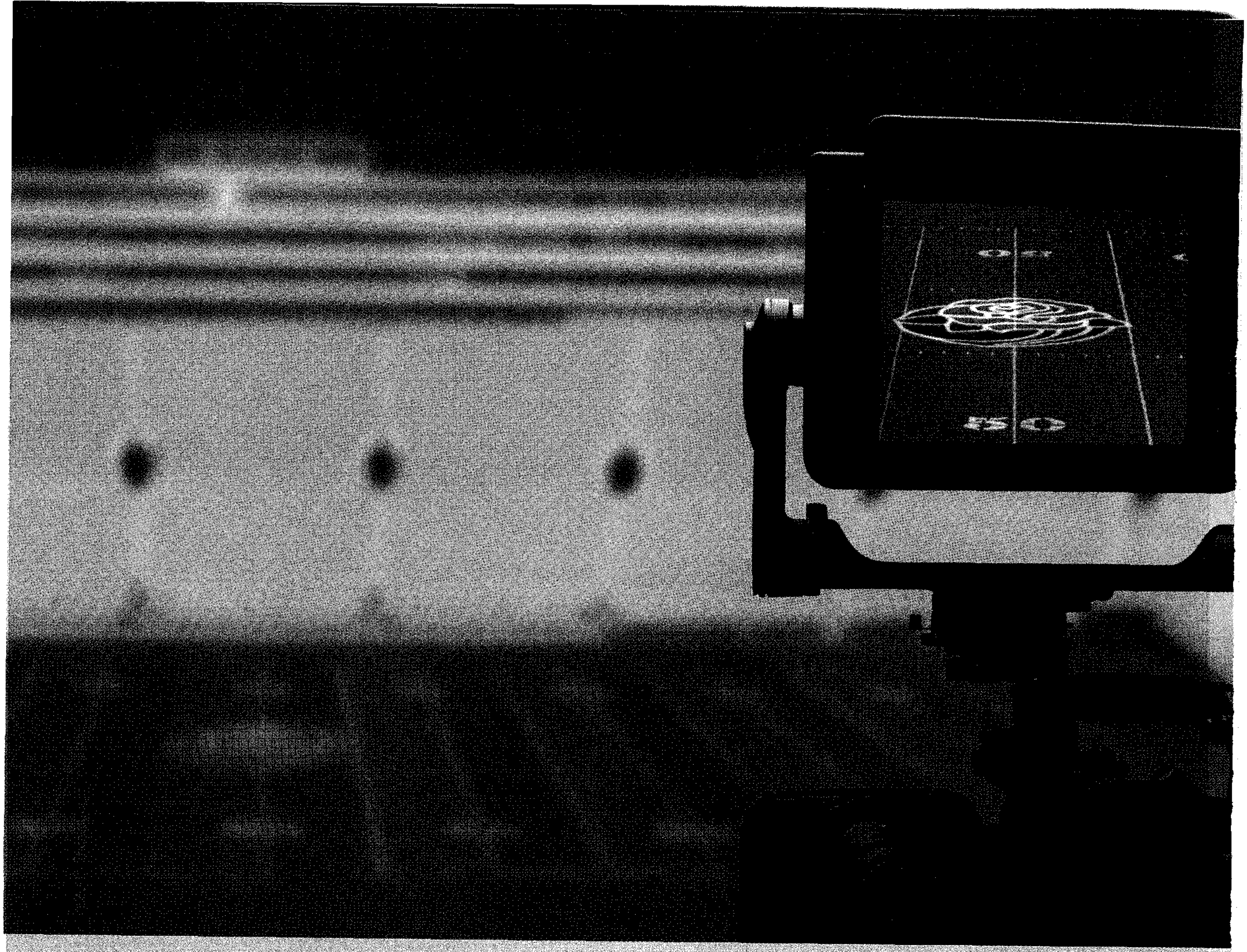

THE WORLD AWAITS THE NEXT GREAT STORY. WILL IT BE A LAST-DITCH HAIL MARY VICTORY? AN INCREDIBLE BUZZER-BEATER? A CELEBRATION PARADE? WHATEVER THE MOMENT, ONE THING IS CERTAIN – THE SHARP AQUOS LIQUID CRYSTAL TELEVISION WILL DELIVER IT WITH TRUER COLOR, GREATER DETAIL AND INCREDIBLE SOUND. EXPERIENCE A TRUE HD WORLD WHERE THERE'S ALWAYS MORE TO SEE. **TO LEARN ABOUT AQUOS, VISIT MORETOSEE.COM**

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BEHIND THE SCENES

PRESIDING OVER "THE WEST WING"

CHRISTOPHER MISIANO, DIRECTOR

Director Misiano

A complex mix of plot, acting, and visual effects creates entertainment alchemy every Sunday night on NBC's Emmy® Award-winning TV series. The following conversation with "The West Wing" executive producer/director Christopher Misiano provides an insider's perspective on the intricacies of the process, and highlights the enhanced pleasure of viewing the hit program in HDTV. The final installment of this three-part series will appear in next week's issue.

Does "The West Wing" have a visual signature?

Misiano: It's a moving, fast-paced visual style—and we're working in the White House, one of the most beautiful sets you can have. This show can handle a wide shot better than any other on TV because of the dominance of the set; it's gorgeous and it feels important.

What makes the show seem so believable?

Misiano: The context of place is ever-present. If you put on a wide-angle 20mm lens and see a room from carpet to ceiling elsewhere, it would be uninteresting. Not on "The West Wing." In terms of the production design, there's a lot of depth built into the set, glass doors, looking from one space into another, with extras in those spaces. This is a show ideally suited for HDTV, where you can see all the fine points clearly.

THE WEST WING

Combining elegance and function, and featuring resolutions up to 1920 x 1080, AQUOS LC TVs allow you to experience the full excitement of high-definition television.

How does "The West Wing" manage to stay fresh after seven years?

Misiano: The show is evolving, from being set totally in the West Wing to out on the campaign trail. Right now we have basically three separate casts of characters—for the White House, and for the Smits and Alda campaigns. Splitting up the storytelling in three directions has sparked new energy into the show, into us, and hopefully into the audience.

Has the advent of HDTV affected your work and creativity?

Misiano: It's not so much affecting the work as the *communication* of the work. "The West Wing's" cameramen and production designers, directors and producers, were always interested in detail. But before it was just for us. Now *you* can actually see the difference.

Describe your home theater.

Misiano: I just bought an HDTV monitor. When I sit at home and watch the show on my set-up—which has DirecTV HD—I think how fabulous it looks.

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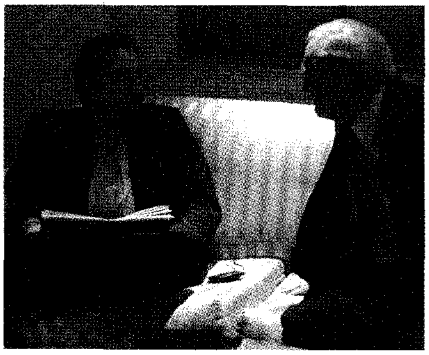

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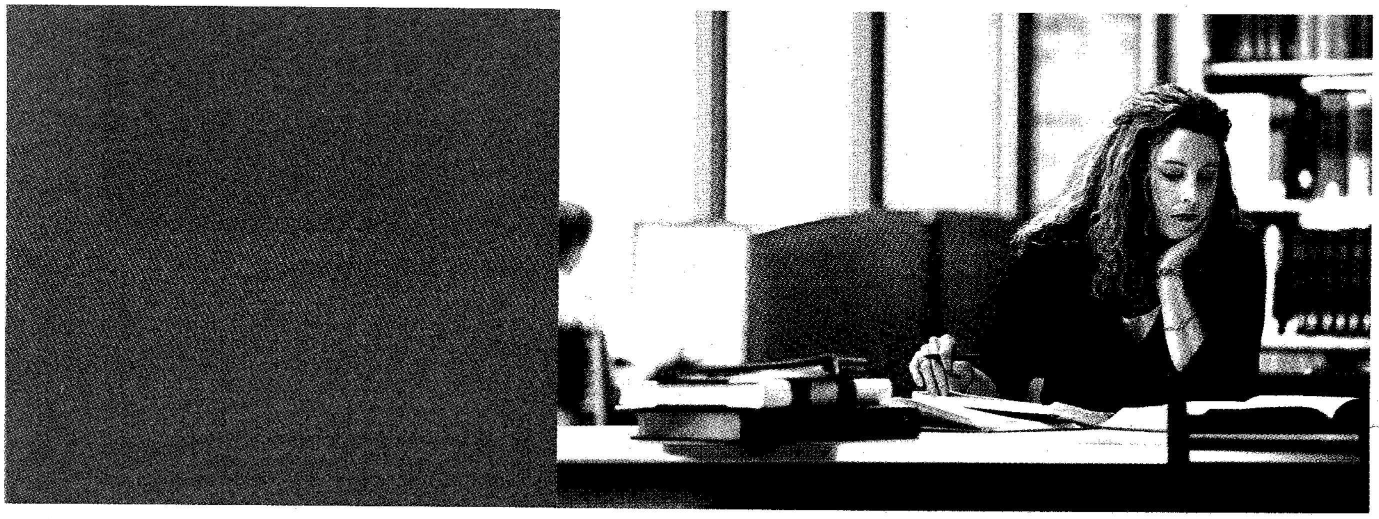

“Novartis drove my cancer into remission in 35 days. Now I’m going for my PhD.”

Suzan was fighting a losing battle against a deadly form of cancer. She dropped out of school. She lost weight, her hair, and at times, her will to live. Then, a Novartis medicine put her cancer into remission in just 35 days. No one can promise what the future holds for any cancer patient, but today Suzan is back—into life and into a PhD in biology.

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THE
NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

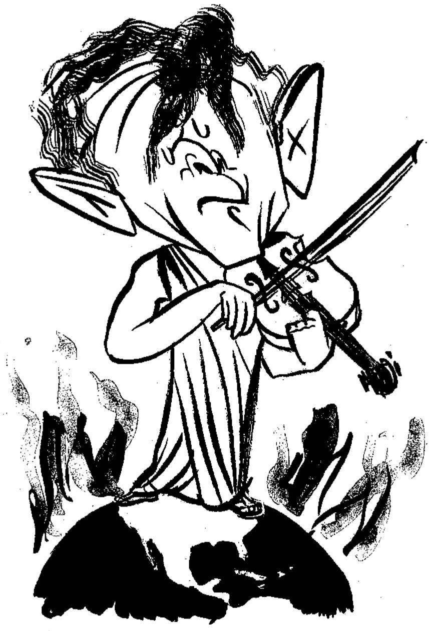
COMMENT
GLOBAL WARNING

The Kilinailau Islands—also known as the Tulun Islands, or the Carteret Atoll—which lie four hundred miles from the coast of Papua New Guinea, are tiny, low, and impoverished. Their fate, thanks to global warming, has long been a foregone conclusion. In 1995, most of the shoreline of Piul and Huene washed away, and the island of Iolasa was cut in half by the sea. Saltwater intrusion has now reached the point where islanders can no longer grow breadfruit, and have to rely on emergency food aid. Last month, Reuters reported that the decision had finally been made to give up. The islands' two thousand residents are being relocated, at the expense of the Papua New Guinean government, to the slightly higher ground of Bougainville Island, some sixty miles to the southwest.

The atoll's evacuation fits into a pattern of grim, if unsurprising, news. In September, the area of Arctic sea ice shrank to a record low, prompting glaciologists to conclude that the ice had entered a state of "accelerating, long-term decline," and to warn that at the current rate of loss the Arctic Ocean would be ice-free in summer "well before the end of this century." At about the same time, a team of researchers at the University of Colorado announced that the extent of surface melt on the Greenland ice sheet had reached a new high, and a second team of researchers, at Georgia Tech, reported that the number of Category 4 and Category 5 hurricanes had nearly doubled in the past three decades. Global temperatures, meanwhile, continued their steady upward climb; 2005 is on track to be the hottest year since record-keeping began, in the late eighteen-hundreds. (Eight of the ten hottest years on record have occurred since 1996.)

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

These events are the all too relevant backdrop for the current round of international climate talks taking place in Montreal. The talks are the first since the Kyoto Protocol entered into force, this past February. Technically, the United States, not being a party to the protocol, will be excluded from many of the sessions in Montreal. But, by virtue of its contribution to climate change—Americans produce nearly a quarter of the world's greenhouse-gas emissions—it will still have a great deal of influence on what does, and does not, get accomplished there.



When the Bush Administration's policy on climate change was first articulated by the President, in early 2002, critics described it as a "total charade," a characterization that, if anything, has come to seem too generous. Stripped down to its essentials, the Administration's position is that global warming is a problem that either will solve itself or won't. The White House has consistently opposed taxes or regulations or mandatory caps to reduce, or even just stabilize, greenhouse-gas emissions, advocating instead a purely voluntary approach, under which companies and individuals can choose to cut their CO_2 production—that is, if they feel like it. (At the G-8 summit this summer, the President embarrassed British Prime Minister Tony Blair by refusing to accede even to minor modifications in this position.) In Montreal, the Administration's chief climate negotiator, Harlan Watson, has been touting the efficacy of the voluntary approach, pointing out that between 2000 and 2003 the United States' carbon-dioxide emissions dropped by .8 per cent. Conveniently left out is the fact that since 2003 they have shot back up again. According to the latest government figures, the country's CO_2 emissions are now three per cent higher than they were three years ago. (The brief dip, it should be noted, had nothing to do with government policy; it was entirely a function of the downturn in the economy.)

Much of the Montreal talks will be taken up with the nitty-gritty of implementing Kyoto—how, for example, to structure the "clean development mechanism," under which industrialized countries can receive credit for financing emissions-reducing projects in developing ones. Such details are clearly important if the protocol is to have an impact. But Kyoto is, and has always been understood as, a first step, and a baby step at that. As President Bush likes to point out, the protocol imposes no restrictions on countries like China and India, whose emissions are growing rapidly. (China is expected to overtake the United States as the world's largest carbon emitter sometime around 2025.) Kyoto, moreover, is a temporary measure; it lapses in 2012, at which point it will need to be replaced by something much more ambitious. The protocol took almost three years to negotiate and seven years to ratify; at that rate, work on its successor should have begun back in 2002. Many countries are pressing for post-Kyoto talks to commence immediately. In characteristic fashion, the Bush Administration is refusing to participate. "The United States seeks to focus attention on progress . . . rather than to detour positive approaches toward a new round of negotiations" is how Watson put it shortly after arriving in Montreal last week.

America's failure to ratify Kyoto is widely viewed as a scandal. The Administration's effort to block a post-Kyoto agreement has received less attention, but is every bit as dangerous. Without the participation of the United States, no meaningful agreement can be drafted for the post-2012 period, and the world will have missed what may well be its last opportunity to alter course. "If we don't get a serious program in place for the long term in this post-Kyoto phase, we will simply not make it," Michael Oppenheimer, a climate scientist at Princeton, told reporters last month. "We will be crossing limits which will basically produce impacts that are unacceptable." Such is the nature of global warming that the problem is always further along than it seems. The kinds of changes that are now becoming evident—the rise in sea levels, the thawing of permafrost, the acidification of the oceans, the acceleration of ice streams—mean that much larger changes are rapidly approaching. To continue to delay is not to put off catastrophe but, rather, to rush toward it.

—Elizabeth Kolbert

STRAGGLERS
THE GENERAL

Thanksgiving began as a gathering of two tribes, the Wampanoag Indians and the Pilgrims, and today that hospitable flavor remains in some dining rooms, where by tradition a few seats are reserved for guests who are far from home or otherwise on their own. This year, the Howe family of Westport, Connecticut, had several last-minute additions to their holiday table. One of them was an Iraqi general, a thirty-year veteran of Saddam Hussein's army, in from Baghdad.

The general, along with seven other Iraqi government officials, was in the United States to observe security facilities along America's borders. The tour, arranged by the State Department, had taken the Iraqis to Seattle, El Paso, and Jacksonville. Now it was finishing up with trips to American households to celebrate Thanksgiving.

At one o'clock in the afternoon, the general, accompanied by a State Department interpreter, arrived at the front door of the Howes' 1850 Greek Revival. Sam Howe is a cable-television executive; his wife, Rebecca, had answered a notice in the Westport *News,* announcing that the International Hospitality Committee of Fairfield County was soliciting families to entertain foreign guests. "We were expecting a Fulbright scholar, or maybe a diplomat," Rebecca said. The Howes had invited a dozen relatives, and had learned of their guest's identity only thirty-six hours before they were to sit down to dinner. They were a bit apprehensive. "We were afraid that having him might alter the tone of the celebration," Sam said. "We thought he might show up in uniform," Rebecca added.

The general—who wore a corduroy topcoat, a maroon V-necked sweater, and a rep tie—turned out to be an ideal guest. Urbane and inquisitive, he spent much of the day on the living-room couch, sipping cranberry spritzers and sampling Wellfleet oysters, spiced nuts, and endive-and-blue-cheese crudités. The general was well informed about the issue of the day, the Iraq war, but he refused to dominate the discussion. "I would like to know what *you* think," he said when he was asked for his political opinions. "It is a day for laughing, not shouting."

The general, who is in his late fifties, is an old hand at courtly palaver, having visited every country in the former Soviet Union as well as most of the Middle East. This was his first trip to America. He'd been nervous about coming, because the America he'd seen in movies looked like a nation of bloodthirsty savages (a perception that Saddam's propagandists had been happy to reinforce). It was a shock to him that he had not been shot at during his weeklong trip. "You are a civilized country," he said over and over.

After the meal, the group (which included two academics, a therapist, and a folk-music teacher) retired to the living room, where the Howes had a fire going. The general described his tour, earlier that day, of the Westport police station. An officer there, "a very generous man," had shown the general around the jail. "I said to him, 'What is the biggest problem in your precinct, murder or robbery?' Do you know what he said to me? 'Neither.' His biggest problem is traffic. You are a very civilized country."

"When you return to Iraq, what will your biggest problem be?" a guest asked.

"Do I have to answer that question?" the general said. "I am enjoying myself too much to think about that right now." He did admit that he was dreading the stomach-churning corkscrew landing that his plane would be forced to make at the airport in Baghdad.

Someone brought out a camera and tried to take a group picture. The

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general edged away. "I have to ask—is this for publication?" he said.

"It's for a family album," the photographer said.

"Good," the general said, moving back into frame. "Because if certain people in Iraq were to find out I am in America . . ." He drew his index finger across his throat.

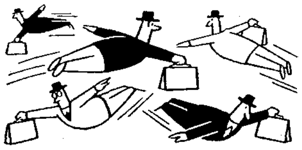
At the end of the afternoon, the general, declining a second serving of chocolate-chip pie, got up from the sofa and said it was time to go.

"I hope we have not made your wife work too hard," he said to Sam.

The general planned to spend his last night in America in New York City, where he had a ticket to see "The Phantom of the Opera" on Broadway.

—Ben Ryder Howe

FROM HERE TO THERE
QUEUE-JUMPING



This time of year, the newspapers come full of terrifying pictures: travellers camped out on grubby airport carpeting; epic traffic jams; deranged hordes descending on shopping malls (and trampling slowpokes). Long lines have a way of bringing out the entitled executive—glancing about with clenched teeth and a sigh of disdainful superiority—in everyone.

There are, of course, methods of circumventing some hassles, each accompanied by its own tinge of guilt (and glee). Perhaps, at the lunch counter, there is that discreet sign offering speedier service to those who order premade sandwiches. (Who cares if nobody else is bold enough to cut to the front? You're in a hurry!) For Disney World visitors, a wave of the Fast Pass is all that's required to bypass the two-hour line for Space Mountain. And soon, for an annual fee of eighty dollars, a set of fingerprints, and an iris scan, an air traveller will be able to insert a Clear card into an A.T.M.-like kiosk and enjoy express passage through airport security, in the form of a private cardholders' line. You'll still need to pass through a metal detector, but a Clear card is likely to spare you the indignity of being "wanded," as Steven Brill, the program's creator, and the author of "After: How America Confronted the September 12 Era," said the other day.

Brill, who is best known as the founder of Court TV, wears a banker's collar and cuffs. He is now the C.E.O. of Verified Identity Pass, Inc., makers of the Clear card, and, as he explained, while sitting in his office above Radio City Music Hall, any similarity between the initials of his company's name and the familiar shorthand for Very Important Person is purely coincidental. "I can prove this to you," he said. "We started out, and it was called Verified Identity Card, but 'V.I.C.' just looked awful. And then it was something with Verified Identity—I forget, but it had a 'D,' 'V.I.D.' And my two daughters said it looked like 'V.D.,' the logo did. So we struggled. There's nothing in our literature that says 'V.I.P.' "

In any event, the company, whose services are bound to appeal to the very important and the self-important alike, was born of Brill's experience in writing "After," and recognizing that what he called "security bottlenecks" were inevitable in the post-9/11 world. On his way to interview John Ashcroft, for instance, Brill waited twenty minutes at the front desk of the Justice Department, only to be asked to show his driver's license. He felt that the experience was both unpleasant and unproductive. "It was sort of, 'Look, she may be stupid, but she *is* ugly.' "

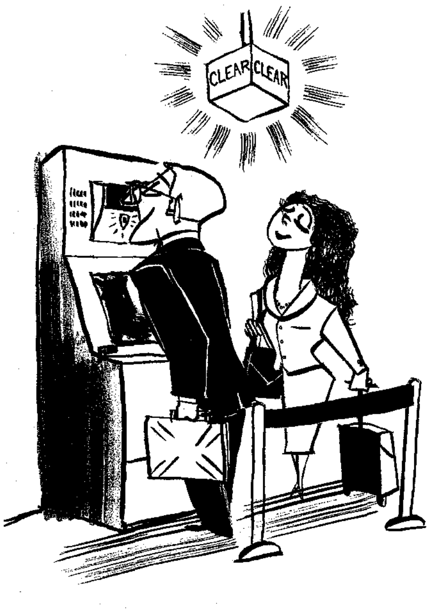
The Transportation Security Administration, he knew, was thinking of instituting a Registered Traveler program (details of which it plans to announce next month), for frequent fliers who have passed a background check with Homeland Security. The idea struck him as so logical—an E-ZPass for luggage-toting pedestrians—that, as he wrote, "I am tempted to try launching it myself."

Brill said, "We take all ten of your fingerprints, we take your iris scans, right and left side, but when you enroll you tell us what your favorite biometric is: do you want us to ask for your right thumb or your left index finger?" He went on, "From T.S.A.'s standpoint, what we're doing is taking a lot of hay out of its proverbial haystack." A Clear member is, at the least, a Very Safe Person.

A pilot V.I.P. program, which now has more than twelve thousand members, has been in place at Orlando International Airport for months. (Other companies are competing for contracts with airports in other cities.) "We just did a proposal for Indianapolis," Brill said, opening a drawer and retrieving a sample card, assigned to John S. Doe. "And San Jose airport just put out a press release a half hour ago saying that they'd signed us up." He added, "These are airports that want to get to the front of the line."

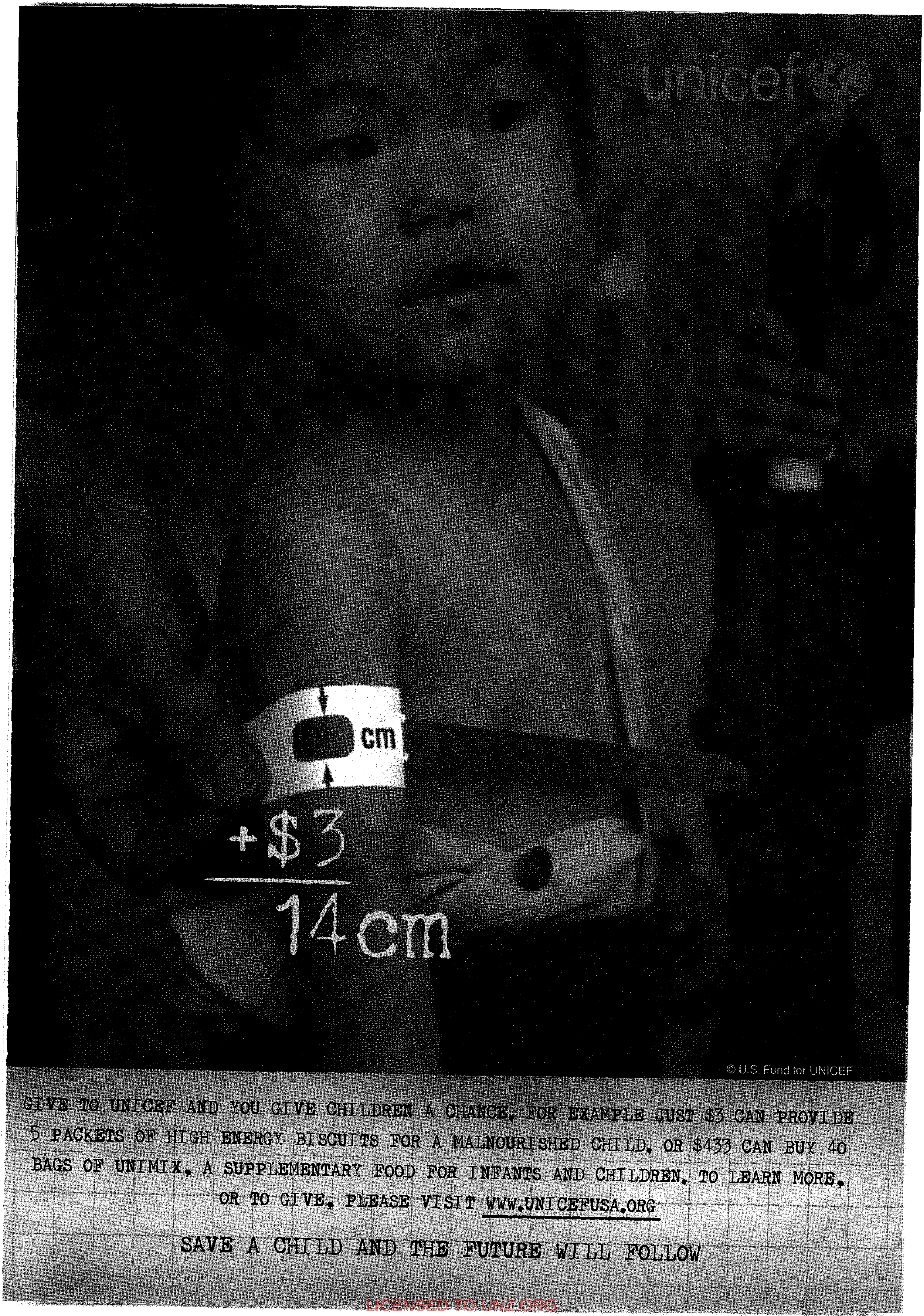
New York, though it may have the highest concentration of passengers who would really, really like to get to the front of the line, is not yet on the docket. But, once it is, the possibilities will be great. "I think what we're starting is something called the Voluntary Credentialling Industry," Brill said. "You can go to the people who run Rockefeller Center, or Madison Square Garden. You can say to them, 'For any given Knicks game, forty per cent of the people coming through are going to have a card like this.'"

He stood up and led the way from his corner office to a set of cubicles where young people were sorting customer-feedback postcards.



"Give me a random batch," he said. On one card, on which all the "Terrific" boxes were checked, the phrase "Nice uniforms" was written at the bottom. An employee held up another card and read it aloud: "This one says, 'It's almost a sinful experience.'"

—Ben McGrath



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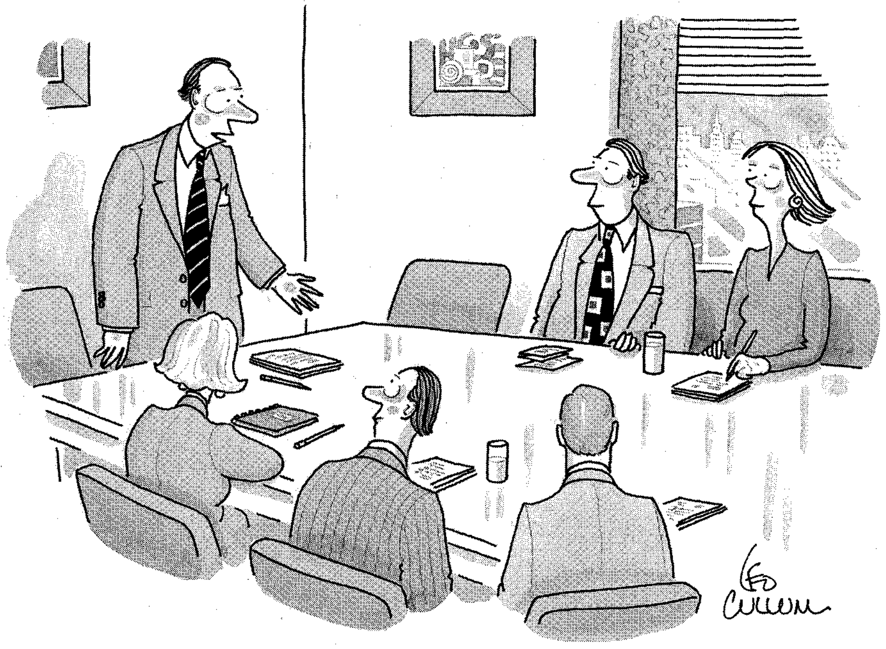

"I know if Crampton were here he'd want us to divvy up his bonus."

LONG ISLAND POSTCARD
HANDS UP

The packing guidelines in the Official Minuteman Civil Defense Corps Volunteer Training Manual fall into three categories. First, there's the essential "Minuteman Duffle," which should include sturdy shoes, clean socks, cellular phone, camcorder, and bug spray. Lip balm is also key, as "sunburn and chapped lips are probably the most common ailments" afflicting volunteers "on the line." The items in the second section, "Nice to Have," are somewhat less common—ground pad and blanket, night-vision equipment, a spotting scope—but nothing you couldn't find at an army-navy store. It was the third section of the list that had several citizens in a near-panic at American Legion Post 94, in Babylon, on Long Island, where the Minutemen were holding a recruiting drive on a recent Saturday. Motion sensors? Infrared detection devices? A thermo-camera?

"We call that stuff 'Extra Handy' for a reason," Chris Simcox, the Corps's president, assured the forty or so residents who had turned out for the session. Simcox had come to Babylon from Tombstone, Arizona, where, until recently, he published the *Tumbleweed*, a local newspaper. In October, the group—which has been running freelance patrols along the U.S.-Mexico border since 2002, prompting President Bush to call its members "vigilantes"—began dispatching civilian guard units to the Canadian border. Simcox was hoping to fill out their ranks with eager Long Islanders. "Just give me one, two days," he said to them. "Bring a lawn chair, put on a floppy hat, and sit and watch the line with binoculars."

Most of the potential grunts didn't need much convincing. "We're all living in border towns now," a high-school teacher named Margaret declared. She described the problem, at least as it went down in Farmingville, where she lives: "We've got Portuguese restaurant owners. They have Mexican chefs who do these little chickens that people like to eat." She went on, "There was an overnight explosion—and I'm not exaggerating—of illegal aliens standing on our corners. Literally hundreds on one street, affecting our quality of life, not letting us get into stores, accosting our daughters for sex." She explained how one day, fed up, she dialled 911. "The operator called me a bigot and hung up," she said.

Outside the meeting hall, a crowd of about fifty anti-Minuteman demonstrators were chanting, "U.S. out of Iraq!" The Minuteman draftees were dismissive. "Communists," they muttered. Or, "Child molesters."

"I'm just waiting for one of them out there to say we're racist toward Canadians," Simcox said, gesturing at the hecklers. "They think we're up here loading M1 carbines." He began plodding through the Corps's standard operating procedure: The Minuteman never touches an illegal alien; he just alerts the border patrol to the alien's location. He never taunts, drives off-road, or litters. He stays quiet and hydrated, and keeps flashlight use to a minimum. Most of all, the Minuteman never, ever starts a fire.

"No felons, no wife beaters, no chronic alcoholics," Simcox said, adding that every prospective border guard is required to pay fifty dollars for a background check. "We are sending a political message," he said. "Congress needs to see your face." (Last week, a movement leader said that President Bush's recent push to reform immigration policy proved that those who "screamed," like the Minutemen, were being heard.) For his part, Simcox seems to have his binoculars trained on Washington more than on Nogales or Ontario. "I see the Minuteman movement turning into a viable third party," he said.

Several of the recruits were visibly disappointed with the moderation of this battle plan, which was proving to be more guerrilla-theatre stunt than citizens' commando raid. A welder named Mark began interrupting with increasing frequency: "Excuse me, Chris. What if we run into Al Qaeda? What are we doing about the airports?" Simcox tried to explain that the program's goal was to show politicians that American citizens were concerned, not to actually catch aliens or terrorists.

"Excuse me, Chris," Mark said. "They call us vigilantes. We *are* vigilantes."

Meanwhile, Margaret was trying to sell her neighbors—including two spry-looking older women in identical "No Guts . . . No Old Glory" T-shirts—on the trip to the Canadian border. "Just drive up there for relaxation," she said. "See the leaves change." They nodded happily and said they'd do their best to make it.

—*Daniel Kurtz-Phelan*

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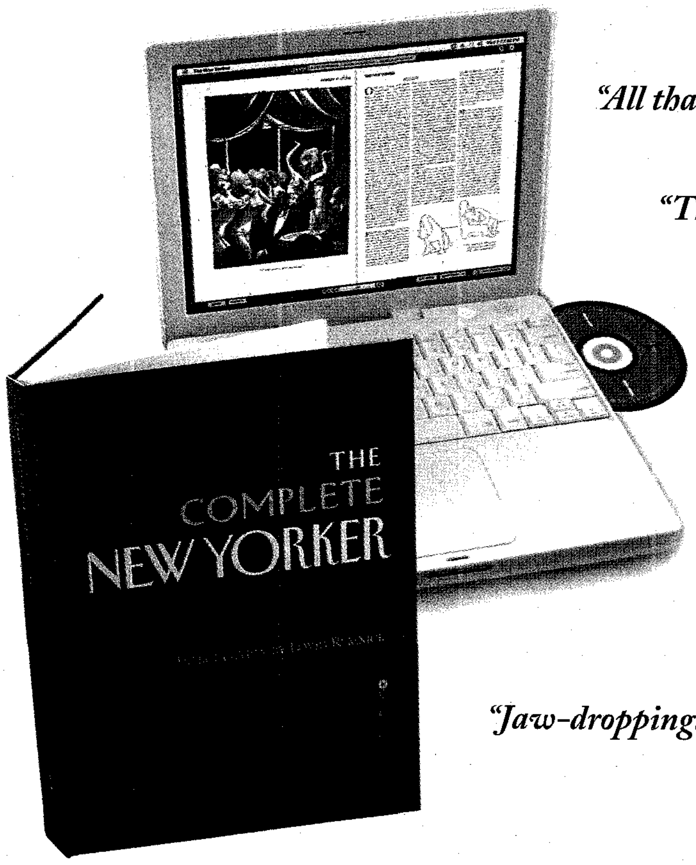

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THE FINANCIAL PAGE

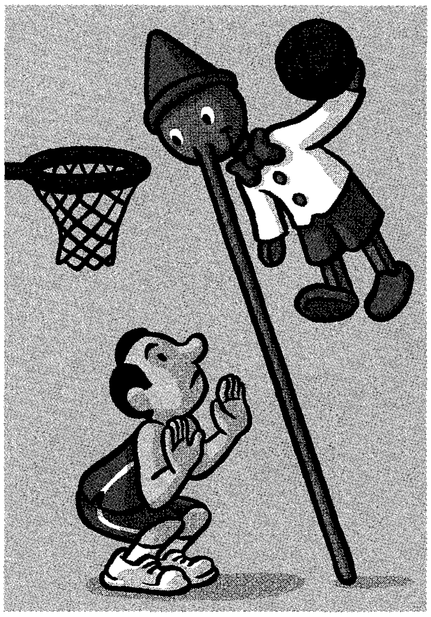
SARBOXED IN?

In the summer of 2002, with the stock market tumbling and fraud at Enron and WorldCom dominating the headlines, there was immense political pressure on Washington to restore investor confidence by doing something about corporate crime. Scrambling to deflect charges of indifference to the plight of widows whose 401(k)s had vanished, Congress hastily wrote and passed the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (dubbed SarbOx), a tough piece of anti-fraud legislation. A Republican-dominated Congress might have been expected to oppose costly business regulations, but politics made SarbOx a thoroughly bipartisan affair. The bill passed unanimously in the Senate, and, when President Bush signed it into law, he proclaimed the end of an "era of low standards and false profits."

Washington's pride in SarbOx, though, was not universally shared. Businesses hated the complexity of the new rules (which, among other things, required corporate executives to certify all the financial results of their companies). Economists fastened on the inefficiency of many of the law's provisions. Stephen Moore, the founder of the Club for Growth, recently called the law "a new cancer," and the former chief financial officer of GlaxoSmithKline deplored it as an "American nightmare." SarbOx, the argument now goes, is a classic example of government overreaction. Its heavy costs outweigh its meagre benefits, standing in the way of the market's efficient allocation of capital. The Securities and Exchange Commission is now talking about loosening enforcement of the regulations, while lobbyists are pushing Congress to revise the bill in the year ahead.

SarbOx is decidedly flawed, most notably because the cost of compliance is too high for small companies. Initially, the S.E.C. suggested that the average company would have to spend ninety-one thousand dollars annually, but the stringency of the regulations means that the real number is well into seven figures (for a start, a company has to appoint people to police it internally), a cost that may discourage smaller firms from going public. However, although SarbOx does need to be mended, that doesn't mean it should be ended. Congress may have passed the law in a fit of political panic, but the fraud that it was designed to deal with, far from being a matter of the proverbial few bad apples, was becoming endemic. Executives routinely engaged in "earnings management," releasing hyped or invented numbers in order to pump up their companies' stock price. Between 1997 and 2002, public companies reported nearly a thousand earnings restatements—admissions that their previous statements had been inaccurate.

This fraud cost investors and lenders an enormous amount of money, vaporizing hundreds of billions of dollars in shareholder value. But corporate crime also had a significant effect on people who had never thought of buying Enron stock or WorldCom bonds. In order to make investors believe that they were earning billions of dollars a year, fraudulent companies often went to great lengths to keep their sales growing, even at the expense of profits (which they were, in any case, inventing). They made foolish acquisitions and high-profile investments that destroyed value instead of creating it—studies suggest that, in the telecommunications sector alone, bad investments totalled tens of billions of dollars. And they hired lots of people whom, in the end, they probably didn't need.

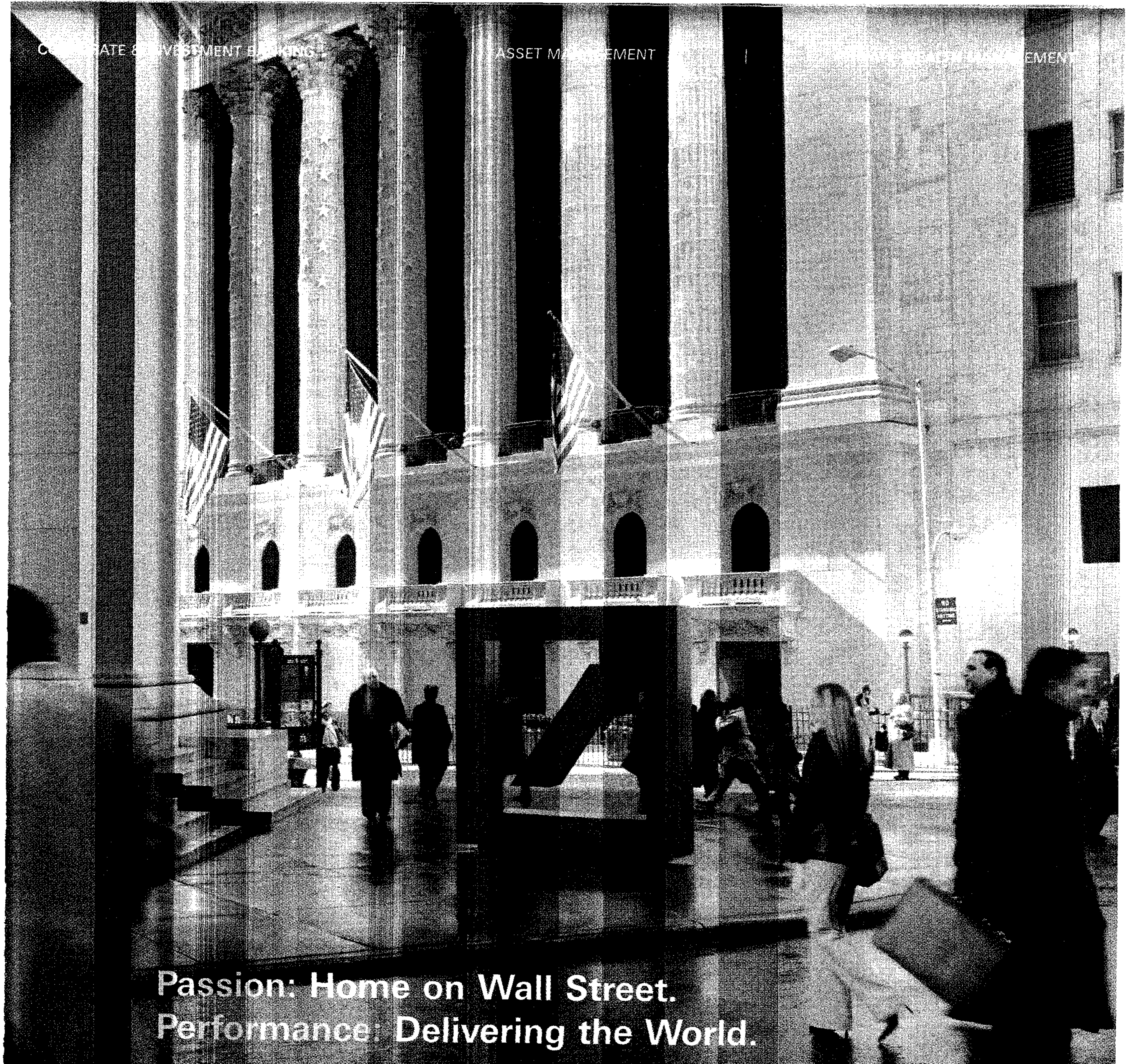


A recent paper by Simi Kedia, of Rutgers, and Thomas Philippon, of N.Y.U., for instance, looked at all the companies known to have been managing earnings between 1997 and 2000. In those years, the companies boosted hiring by a full twenty-five per cent, while other companies increased hiring by less than seven per cent. As soon as the companies were forced to come clean, employees were sacked. Kedia and Philippon estimate that the re-stating companies fired between two hundred and fifty thousand and six hundred thousand people between 2000 and 2002, slashing payrolls by more than twenty-five per cent, while other companies cut them by just 1.5 per cent.

All this playacting affected not just the fraudulent companies but also their competitors, with serious consequences for the American economy at large. As Gil Sadka, an accounting professor at Columbia, suggests in a recent paper, WorldCom's lies—about its profits, about the amount of Internet traffic its network was carrying, and about the total demand for telecom capacity—made competitors like A.T.&T. and Sprint look inefficient. Trying to keep pace with WorldCom led these companies to overinvestment in new technology and to price wars, followed by cost-cutting campaigns, layoffs, and, in A.T.&T.'s case, the decision to break up the company. WorldCom's deception had consequences that were anything but local. It led to the misallocation of billions of dollars in capital across an entire industry, and rearranged the lives of tens of thousands of workers. It's hard to think of many things more inefficient than that.

Corporate fraud, in other words, isn't expensive just for the people who have been defrauded. It also inflicts what economists call "social costs" on the economy as a whole. If fraud were just a matter of executives ripping off shareholders, we could expect the market to come up with a cost-effective solution. Social costs, on the other hand, generally require regulation, which is where SarbOx comes in. Because it tries not merely to punish fraud but to prevent it from happening in the first place, the law's costs are a lot more visible than its benefits. But a world without SarbOx would be costlier still.

—*James Surowiecki*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LETTER FROM JEDDA

YOUNG OSAMA

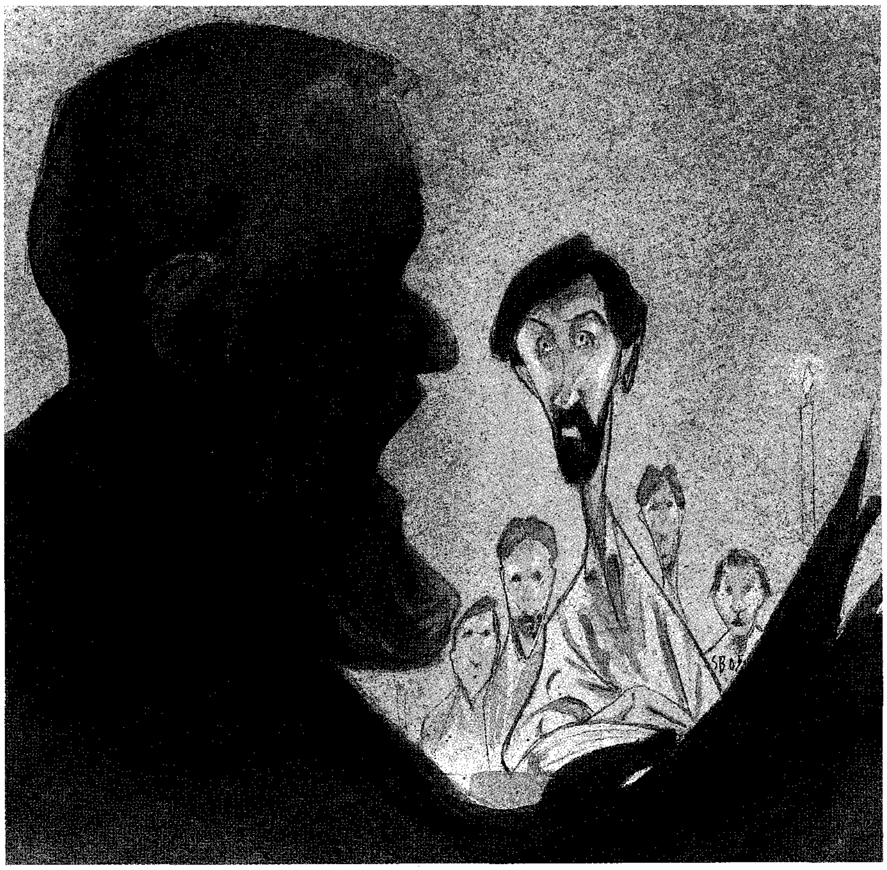
How he learned radicalism, and may have seen America.

BY STEVE COLL

Osama bin Laden's old school—the Al Thagher Model School—sits on several dozen arid acres lined by eucalyptus trees, whose branches have been twisted by winds from the Red Sea. The campus spreads north from the Old Mecca Road, near downtown Jedda, the Saudi Arabian port city where bin Laden spent most of his childhood and teen-age years. The school's main building is a two-story rectangle constructed from concrete and fieldstone in a featureless modern style. Inside, dim hallways connect two wings of classrooms. In bin Laden's day—he graduated in 1976—there was a wing for middle-school students, and another for the high school. Between them is a spacious interior courtyard, and from the second floor students could lean over balcony railings and shout at their classmates below, or pelt them with wads of paper. Most Al Thagher students, including bin Laden, were commuters, but there were a few boarders; they lived on the second floor, as did some of the school's foreign teachers. It was in this upstairs dormitory, a schoolmate of bin Laden's told me, that a young Syrian physical-education teacher led an after-school Islamic study group for a few outstanding boys, and it was there, beginning at about age fourteen, that bin Laden received his first formal education in some of the precepts of violent jihad.

During the nineteen-sixties and early seventies, Al Thagher was the most prestigious high school in Jedda; compared with other schools in Saudi Arabia, it had a relatively secular flavor. Many wealthy Saudi parents sent their sons abroad for secondary education—to Lebanon, Egypt, England, or the United States—but for those who kept their boys in Jedda "Al Thagher was *the* school of the élite," Saleha Abedin, a longtime Jedda educator, said. (Abedin is now a vice-dean of Jedda's Dar Al-Hekma College, a private women's college.) Al Thagher—the name means, roughly, "the haven"—was founded in the early nineteen-fifties, initially in the nearby city of Taif, with support from Faisal bin Abdul Aziz, who became the King of Saudi Arabia in 1964. Faisal was a complicated man; he developed the kingdom's schools, roads, and hospitals very rapidly, yet he also tried to preserve Saudi Arabia's austere Islamic traditions, partly as a defense against international Communism. The Al Thagher Model School showcased Faisal's interest in science and Western methods of education; in the nineteen-sixties, it was the only school in Jedda with air-conditioning. Its students did not wear the national dress, a *thobe* and cloth headdress, but, rather, a uniform that imitated the styles of English and American prep schools: white button-down shirts with ties, gray slacks, black shoes and socks, and, in the winter months, charcoal blazers.

Each year's graduating class numbered about sixty boys. Among them were young princes from the Saudi royal family, as well as privileged commoners like bin Laden. Every morning, the students would assemble in rows for a military-style call to order; on a stool to one side sat a schoolmaster with a cane, ready to discipline boys who misbehaved, by beating them on the soles of their bare feet. The school's curriculum included English-language instruction given by teachers from Ireland and England and demanding courses in mathematics. At the same time, as with all institutions in Saudi Arabia, Al Thagher adhered to Islamic ritual. At midday, students would kneel together for the Zuhr, or noon prayer.



An after-school study group was initially offered as a way of earning extra credit.

STEVE BRODNER

Assuming that bin Laden is still alive, he is now forty-eight years old. He developed his vision for his global jihad organization, Al Qaeda, over the course of more than three decades, and his formative experiences have included participation in combat during the anti-Soviet Afghan war of the nineteen-eighties; prolonged exile from Saudi Arabia; the survival of at least two assassination attempts; at least four marriages, which produced at least a dozen children; and, lately, the trials of being the world's most wanted fugitive. (Several American intelligence officers and diplomats have told me in recent months that they assume bin Laden is hiding somewhere in Pakistan, or perhaps in a remote area of Afghanistan, but there has been no visible progress in the effort to locate him. His most recent videotaped speech was a rambling diatribe broadcast four days before the last United States Presidential election. A few weeks later, the Al Jazeera television network broadcast an audiotape attributed to bin Laden, in which he praised Al Qaeda's new leader in Iraq, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Since then, bin Laden has not been heard from, and there has been speculation—not for the first time—that he is dead. Late last month, the Senate Democratic leader, Harry Reid, told a television interviewer, "I heard today that he may have died in the earthquake that they had in Pakistan.")

Bin Laden has never spoken publicly about his time at Al Thagher, and the record of other reliable testimony is thin. Still, from interviews with people who knew him as a teen-ager, or who knew his family or the school, a portrait of bin Laden's high-school years has begun to emerge, one that may help to explain some of the earliest sources of his beliefs.

In a 1998 interview, later broadcast on Al Jazeera, bin Laden said that he was born in Riyadh, the capital of Saudi Arabia, on March 10, 1957. "Then God was gracious to us as we went to Holy Medina six months after I was born," he continued. The rest of his youth, he said, was spent in the western Saudi Arabian province known as the Hejaz, which lies between the Red Sea and central Arabia; it is the site of the two holiest cities in Islam, Mecca and Medina, where the most important events in the life of the Prophet Muhammad occurred.

Bin Laden is the only child of the marriage between Alia Ghanem, who was born in Syria, and Muhammad bin Laden, who was born in Yemen but migrated as a child to Jedda, where he made his fortune as a building contractor for the Saudi royal family during the nineteen-fifties and sixties. Osama's parents divorced soon after he was born, according to Khaled M. Batarfi, a Saudi journalist who knew Osama during the nineteen-seventies. Osama's mother then married a man named Muhammad al-Attas, who worked at her former husband's company. The couple had four children, and Osama lived in the new household with three stepbrothers and one stepsister. Bin Laden's natural father, who had more than fifty children by more than a dozen wives, died on September 3, 1967, when his company airplane, a twin-engine Beechcraft, which was being flown by an American charter pilot, crashed as it attempted to land on a mountain airstrip in Saudi Arabia's southern Asir province, where bin Laden had been overseeing road-construction projects.

The next year, Osama bin Laden enrolled at Al Thagher, according to Brian Fyfield-Shayler, a Briton who taught English at the school at the time. Fyfield-Shayler has said that when bin Laden arrived at the school he was already unusually tall (today, his height is estimated at six feet four). He was not, however, a particularly forceful personality. In an intermediate-English class, "I was trying to push the spoken aspects of the language," Fyfield-Shayler recalled in an interview for a documentary film produced in Britain last year. "To succeed, the student needs to be prepared to make mistakes. They need to make a bit of an exhibition of themselves, and Osama was rather shy and reserved and perhaps a little afraid of making mistakes." Seamus O'Brien, an Irishman who taught English at Al Thagher, told me that he remembers Osama as "a nice fellow and a good student. There were no problems with him. . . . He was a quiet lad. I suppose silent waters run deep."

A schoolmate of bin Laden's told me that during the eighth or ninth grade, around 1971 or 1972, bin Laden was invited to join the Islamic study group. In that period at Saudi high schools and universities, it was common to find Syrian and Egyptian teachers, many of whom had become involved with dis-

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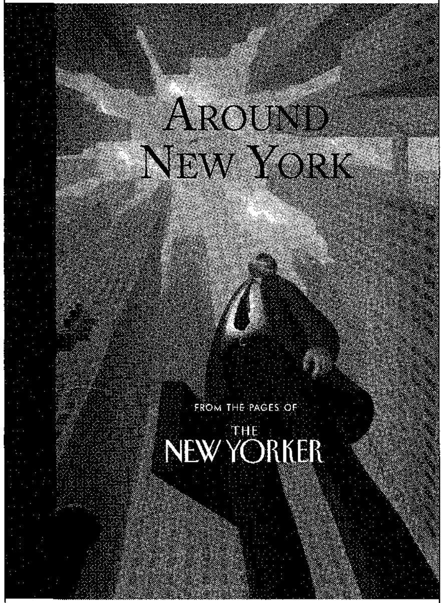

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sident Islamist political groups in their home countries. Some of these teachers were members of, or were influenced by, the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist organization founded in Egypt in 1928 by a schoolteacher, Hassan al-Banna. The Brotherhood was initially a religious-minded movement opposed to British colonial rule in Egypt; later, following Britain's withdrawal from the region, the Brotherhood's leaders continued their struggle against the secular, socialist Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser, who took power in 1952. In his approach to the Brotherhood, Nasser alternated between periods of accommodation and brutal crackdowns. Some of the Brotherhood's organizers were forced into exile, and they began to form new chapters across the Muslim world. Their aim was to replace secular and nationalist Arab leaders with Islamic governments, and they often operated clandestinely. Today, the movement typically recruits its members from élite, well-educated families; its goals include the imposition throughout Muslim societies of *sharia*—law as set forth in the Koran—and the empowerment of Islamic scholars as cultural arbiters and dispensers of justice. Brotherhood members have openly held seats in elected parliaments in Kuwait and Jordan; last month, the movement's members made a strong showing in parliamentary elections in Egypt, despite being formally banned there. Over the years, the Brotherhood has operated both in the open and in secret, through peaceful political campaigning and through support for terrorism.

In Saudi Arabia during the nineteen-sixties, King Faisal welcomed exiled teachers from Syria, Egypt, and Jordan, even if they were influenced by the Brotherhood, because he believed that they had been unfairly persecuted for their religious and political beliefs. He also hoped that their emphasis on Islamic teachings might help to inoculate Saudi Arabia against ideas such as socialism and secular pan-Arab nationalism, which were then spreading through Arab societies. Moreover, as he expanded Saudi Arabia's schools, Faisal faced a shortage of qualified instructors of all kinds. The King "needed teachers," Khaled al-Maeena, a prominent Jedda newspaper editor, told me. "Where would you get them?" Egypt and Syria offered Saudi Arabia a ready source at a time when the kingdom, barely a generation removed from widespread poverty and illiteracy, was struggling to produce teachers from its own population.

Formal political activity was banned in Saudi Arabia, so the Brotherhood-influenced teachers had to be careful. "When they came here, they realized the system does not allow any association" that might smack of politics, said Muhammad Salahuddin, a magazine publisher and journalist in Jedda who came to Saudi Arabia from Egypt. Rather than organize a political network, the teachers often introduced their students more informally to the Brotherhood's precepts of Islamic activism, political consciousness, and violent jihad against Christian occupiers or secular leaders. The principal mission at Al Thagher, as laid out by the headmaster and wealthy supporters in the Jedda merchant community, was to prepare élite young Saudis for roles in the kingdom's modernizing economy; it had nothing to do with the Brotherhood's goals. The after-school Islamic study group that bin Laden joined was initially offered to exceptional students with the promise of earning extra credit.

Bin Laden's experience in the group was described for me during several interviews with a schoolmate who is now a successful professional in Saudi Arabia, and who asked not to be further identified, because, he said, he did not want to risk reprisals from bin Laden's sympathizers. The schoolmate had never given interviews about Al Thagher's after-school Islamic study group, but he decided to do so, he said, because he hoped his account might warn other Saudi parents about the potential dangers of such informal tutoring, particularly of the young and impressionable. His specific account of the group's meetings is in accord with the more general recollections of several other Saudis who knew bin Laden during his Al Thagher years.

The Syrian physical-education teacher who led the group at Al Thagher was "tall, young, in his late twenties, very fit," the schoolmate recalled. "He had a beard—not a long beard like a mullah,

• •

however. He didn't look like he was religious. . . . He walked like an athlete, upright and confident. He was very popular. He was charismatic. He used humor, but it was planned humor, very reserved. He would plan some jokes to break the ice with us.

"Some of us were athletes, some of us were not," the schoolmate said of the group's initial membership, which, besides bin Laden, included the sons of several prominent Jedda families. The Syrian "promised that if we stayed we could be part of a sports club, play soccer. I very much wanted to play soccer. So we began to stay after school with him from two o'clock until five. When it began, he explained that at the beginning of the session we would spend a little bit of time indoors at first, memorizing a few verses from the Koran each day, and then we would go play football. The idea was that if we memorized a few verses each day before soccer, by the time we finished high school we would have memorized the entire Koran, a special distinction.

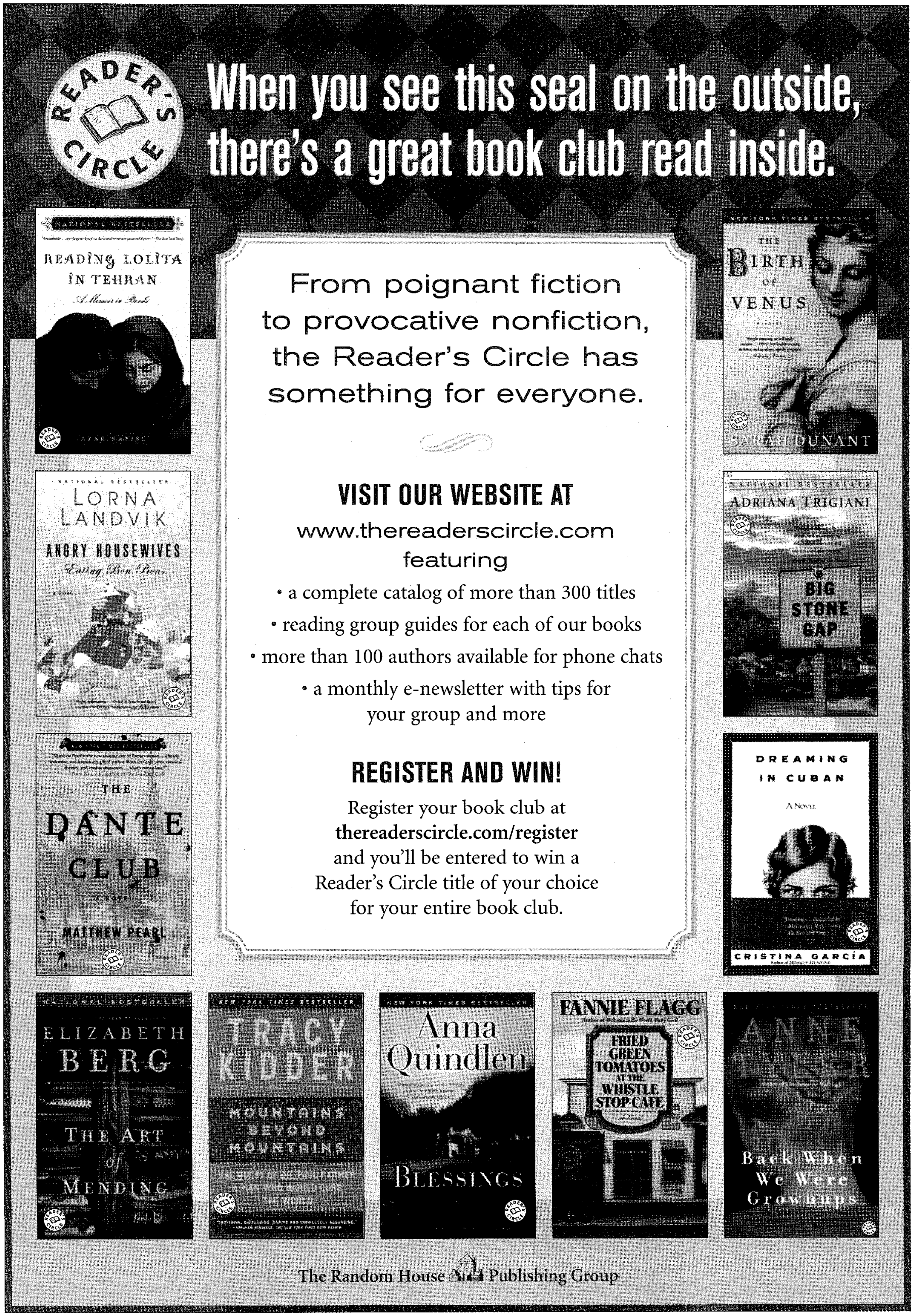
"Osama was an honorable student," the schoolmate continued. "He kept to himself, but he was honest. If you brought a sandwich to school, people would often steal it as a joke or eat it if you left it on the desk. This was a common thing. We used to leave our valuables with Osama, because he never cheated. He was sober, serious. He didn't cheat or copy from others, but he didn't hide his paper, either, if others wanted to look over his shoulder."

At first, the study group proceeded as the teacher had promised. "We'd sit down, read a few verses of the Koran, translate or discuss how it should be interpreted, and many points of view would be offered. Then he'd send us out to the field. He had the key to the goodies—the lockers where the balls and athletic equipment were kept. But it turned out that the athletic part of it was just disorganized, an add-on. There was no organized soccer. I ended up playing a lot of one-on-one soccer, which is not very much fun."

As time passed, the group spent more and more time inside. After about a year, bin Laden's schoolmate said, he began to feel trapped and bored, but by then the group had developed a sense of camaraderie, with bin Laden emerging as one of its committed participants. Gradually, the teen-agers stopped memorizing the Koran and began to read and discuss *hadiths,* interpretive stories of the life of the Prophet Muhammad, of varied provenance, which are normally studied to help illuminate the ideas imparted by the Koran. The after-school study sessions took place in the Syrian gym teacher's room, on the second floor. The teacher would light a candle on a table in the middle of the room, and the boys, including bin Laden, would sit on the floor and listen. The stories that the Syrian told were ambiguous as to time and place, the schoolmate recalled, and they were not explicitly set in the time of the Prophet, as are traditional *hadiths.* "It was mesmerizing," he said, and increasingly the Syrian teacher told them "stories that were really violent. I can't remember all of them now, except for one."

It was a story "about a boy who found God—exactly like us, our age. He wanted to please God and he found that his father was standing in his way. The father was pulling the rug out from under him when he went to pray." The Syrian "told the story slowly, but he was referring to 'this brave boy' or 'this righteous boy' as he moved toward the story's climax. He explained that the father had a gun. He went through twenty minutes of the boy's preparation, step by step—the bullets, loading the gun, making a plan. Finally, the boy shot the father." As he recounted this climax, the Syrian declared, "Lord be praised—Islam was released in that home." As the schoolmate recounted it, "I watched the other boys, fourteen-year-old boys, their mouths open. By the grace of God, I said 'No' to myself. . . . I had a feeling of anxiety. I began immediately to think of excuses and how I could avoid coming back."

The next day, he stopped attending the after-school sessions. Eventually, after an awkward period of pulling away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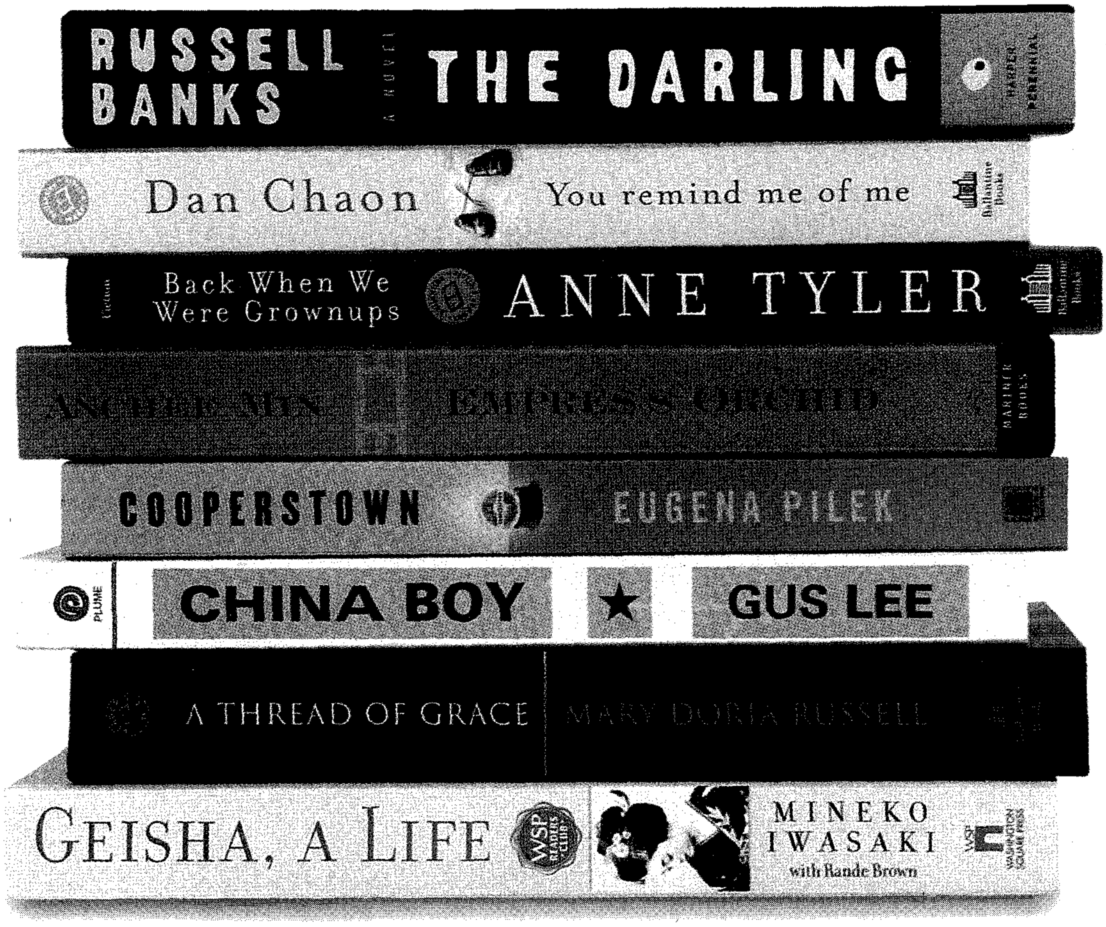
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‹ TALKING POINTS ›

By Evantheia Schibsted

On the second Thursday of every month in their Hamptons homes, Diane Lewis and her fellow Book Runners—a group of Long Island women who range in age from their forties to seventies—nibble on cheese and crackers, sip wine, and swap insights on books. "Getting input from different age groups gives us a cross-section of ideas," says Lewis. "You don't just hear from people with the same life experiences." These differing points of view, in turn, deepen each person's appreciation of reading.

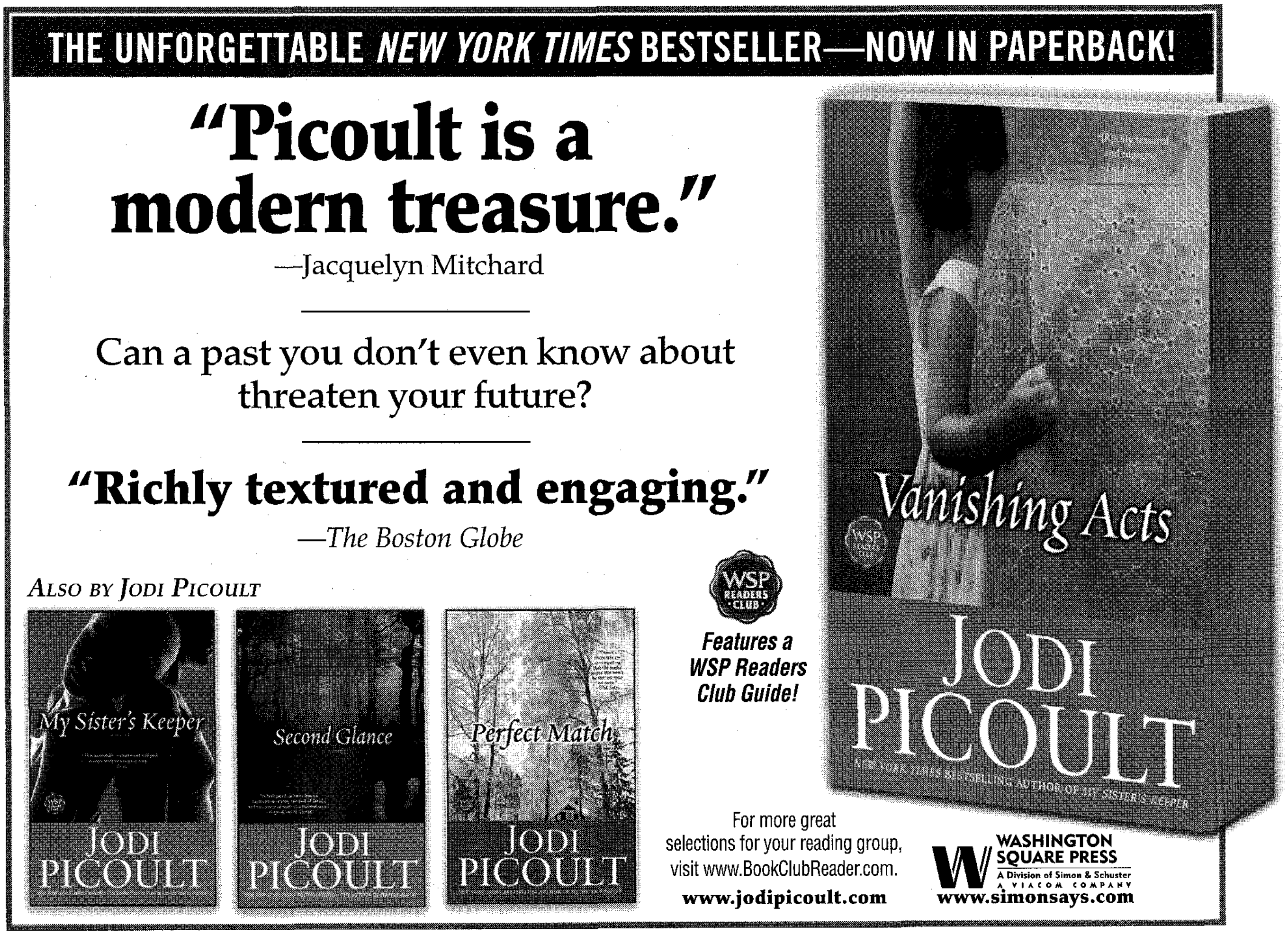
(Talking Points continued)

Recently, the Book Runners discussed the best-seller, "The Jane Austen Book Club," by Karen Joy Fowler. "At first we thought this range of life scenarios couldn't have been experienced within one reading group," Lewis says, when referring to the book's intrigues involving a sick child, an estranged couple, and sisters who no longer speak with one another. "But as we examined the book more closely, we realized we could identify with it." What's next on her club's agenda hasn't yet been determined, but Lewis wants to explore "My Sister's Keeper," by Jodi Picoult. After she read a Q & A with the author in the back of the book, she says, "It was interesting to learn how Picoult chose designer babies as a topic."

In Bigfork, Montana, The Ladies' Afternoon Reading Club gathers each month at Electric Avenue Books. "It's not a gossip fest," says Katie Callan, the bookstore's owner. Like Lewis, Callan relishes her club members' diverse life experiences: "Some of us went to college. Some of us didn't. We don't talk about that. We talk about the books." Soon, they'll begin "Front Row at the White House," the autobiography of legendary Washington correspondent Helen Thomas.

› LIVELY DEBATE

Callan's group occasionally relies on reader's guides—those author Q & A's and lists of discussion topics that are increasingly appearing in the back of books. Intended to aid group discussions, these guides can trigger animated exchanges. Stay-at-home mother of five Rose Kamitsuka of Wilmington, North Carolina, finds a lifeline at these meetings. Her group recently read "Geisha, A Life," which she says was



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a welcome respite from the selection of Dr. Seuss she usually reads aloud to her children.

"The liveliest discussions move from an exploration of the book to people's own lives. As people build trust in the group, the conversations grow deeper and richer," says Jane von Mehren, vice president and publisher of Random House's trade paperbacks division. Adds Carla Gray, assistant director of marketing at Houghton Mifflin: "Questions work best when they lead discussions to broader topics but ultimately leave the book in the forefront of the reader's mind."

Compelling questions are often inspired by feedback received from readers. At HarperPerennial's on-line newsletter, readers are encouraged to send in questions. "More often than not, they want to know what inspires the author," says Jennifer Hart, associate publisher at HarperPerennial. "What brought them to write the book? How did the book evolve during the writing process?"

› AN ADDED BONUS

As Hart and other publishers point out, reader's guides have morphed into something more than a traditional list of questions. Not created as stand-alone entities, they provide an in-depth package for readers to discover. Hart likens these guides to DVD bonus material meant to enhance the viewing experience for movie buffs. For example, at HarperPerennial, a new feature for some of their paperbacks is P. S., a supplementary section that can include authors Q & A's and background material. They also have an "invite the author" program, where writers connect with reading groups by telephone.

Starting The Discussion

Thought-provoking queries can lead book club members from lively examinations of characterization and plot to global issues facing the world today. Such questions enhance the reader's enjoyment of a title and enable encounters with fellow literary enthusiasts. Here is a sampling of some titles' discussion points:

THE ALPHABET SISTERS

Monica McInerney (Reader's Circle Ballantine/ Random House)

Three estranged sisters are summoned home for their grandmother's eightieth birthday.

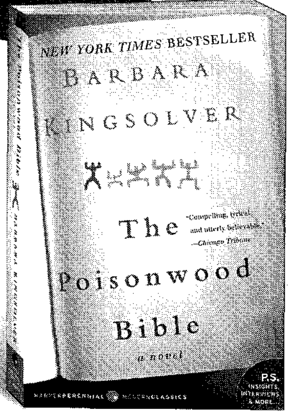
- How does Anna's diagnosis change the family?
- Have you ever been in a similar position with a family feud that seemed irresolvable?

THE BOOK OF SALT

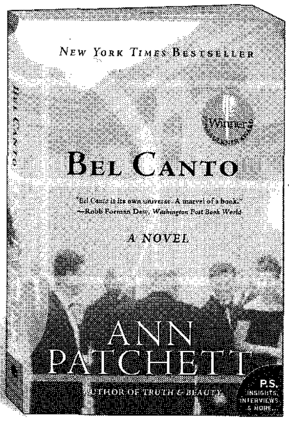
Monique Truong (Houghton Mifflin)

Using salt as a metaphor, this novel follows the narrator's life from his native Vietnam to his night life indulgences in Paris while in the employ of Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein.

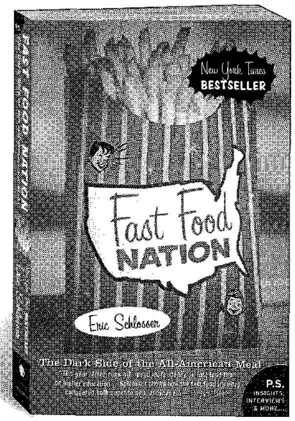
P.S. is the only place to find out...



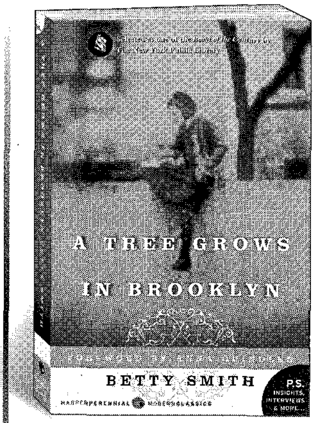
...that Barbara Kingsolver struggled many years to begin *The Poisonwood Bible*—and developed an almost surreal dread of the file cabinet into which she stuffed her research materials.



...that Ann Patchett barely listened to opera before she began doing research for *Bel Canto*.


New York Times BESTSELLER
Fast Food NATION
Eric Schlosser
The Dark Side of the All-American Meal
P.S.

...that a slaughterhouse criticized by Eric Schlosser in *Fast Food Nation* has since been responsible for the third-largest meat recall in U.S. history.



...that the wartime copy of *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* was specially designed to fit in a soldier's rucksack.

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(Talking Points continued)

Many authors view reader's guides as an extension of their work and are often willing to pen the questions themselves or, at the very least, comment on the questions before they go to press. Says Houghton Mifflin's Gray: "Why not go directly to the source?"

In some cases, writers provide guides with material not offered elsewhere. Anne Tyler, author of "Back When We Were Grownups" and "Breathing Lessons," for instance, typically does not grant interviews. She does, however contribute to the on-line component of Random House's Reader's Circle.

When a title's subject matter involves a universal theme, it's more likely to resonate with book clubs. Kathryn Court, publisher of Plume and president and publisher of Penguin Books, points to "Someone Not Really Her Mother" as an example of this. The book is about a woman caring for her mother who is a victim of Alzheimer's. "The mother who is dying had a complicated and interesting life," says Court. She adds, "Often, we truly don't know the people we love the most until something happens."

For similar reasons, "Tales from the Bed," which follows writer Jenifer Estess through her struggle with A.L.S. (Lou Gehrig's disease), strikes a chord with clubs. "People are empathetic to her plight," explains Sue Fleming, vice president and marketing director for Simon & Schuster's adult trade division. "It's the human condition, the human story." And for book clubs around the country, that's what counts. ■

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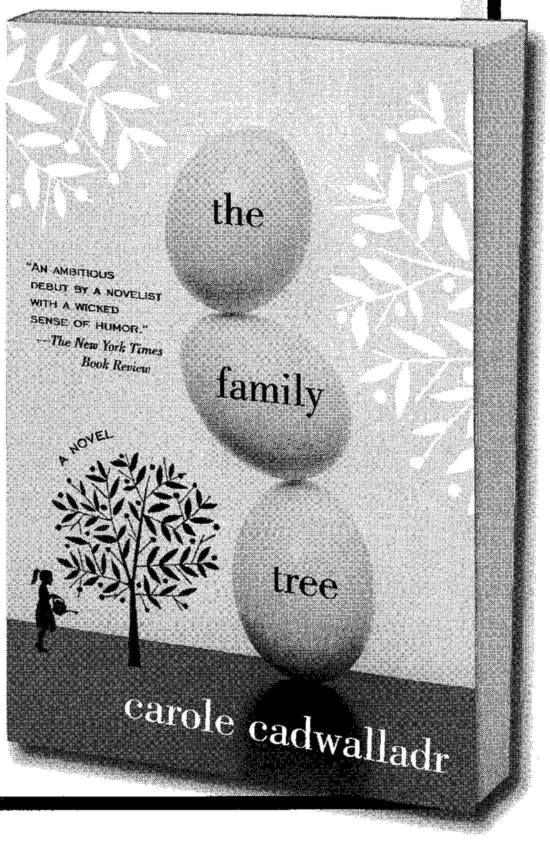

"AN AMBITIOUS DEBUT BY A NOVELIST WITH A WICKED SENSE OF HUMOR."
—The New York Times Book Review
the
family
tree
A NOVEL
carole cadwalladr

(Starting the Discussion continued)

- How is food—and cooking—used as seduction in "The Book of Salt?"
- Compare the meals of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas with the meals Bính shares with others.

THE END OF OIL
Paul Roberts (Houghton Mifflin)

What will happen to the world's economy when our global supply of oil runs dry?

- Of all the evidence and arguments that Paul Roberts presents, which did you find most surprising?
- Do you feel impelled to address energy inefficiencies in your own life, by installing energy-saving appliances in your home, or by choosing "greener" means of transportation?

THE EXPLOITS & ADVENTURES OF MISS ALETHEA DARCY
Elizabeth Aston (Touchstone)

In this recreation of Jane Austen's world, the youngest daughter of Elizabeth Bennet and Mr. Darcy suffers mistreatment from her husband. After escaping to Europe, fate leads Alethea Darcy to love and the world of Italian opera.

- Why do you think the convention of marriage has persisted?
- How have the reasons to marry changed over the years?

THE FALLS
Joyce Carol Oates (HarperPerennial)

After her husband throws himself into Niagara Falls on their wedding night, Ariah meets Dirk, who becomes the father of her children. Tragedy, however, poisons her seemingly halcyon existence.

- How do the physical and psychological

circumstances of Ariah's first marriage echo throughout her marriage to Dirk?

- What is the author saying about the nature of families in "The Falls?"

HOW SOCCER EXPLAINS THE WORLD

Franklin Foer (HarperPerennial)

By examining the game of soccer in different countries, Foer sheds light on the global economy.

- Create an argument for and against the globalization of soccer. What are the benefits? Who are the victims?
- "An entire movement of Jews" believed that soccer, and sport more generally, would liberate them from the violence and tyranny of anti-Semitism." What did the Hakoah club contribute to the sport of soccer?

HOW TO BE LOST

Amanda Eyre Ward (Reader's Circle—Ballantine/Random House)

Caroline, a New Orleans waitress, reveals how her family has never recovered from the unresolved disappearance of the youngest child.

- What is the significance of the title?
- At first, Caroline avoids visiting her mother in New York for the holiday, but by book's end, she feels at home there. What brings about this change?

THE JANE AUSTEN BOOK CLUB

Karen Joy Fowler (Plume)

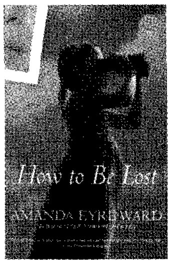
Five women and one man meet once a month to discuss Austen's novels. As they examine the author and her characters, the stories of their own lives unfold with wit, charm, and honesty.

- The author opens the novel with an Austen quote, part of which reads, "Seldom, very seldom does complete truth belong to any human disclosure." Do you agree?
- Sylvia asks, "Why should unhappiness be so much more powerful than happiness?" How would you answer her?

MY SISTER'S KEEPER

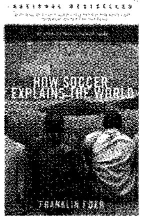
Jodi Picoult (Washington Square Press)

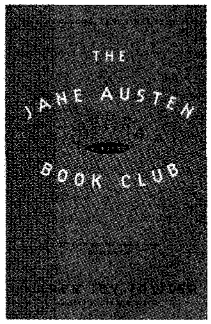
Anna is conceived to provide a donor match for her sister Kate, who has a rare form of leukemia. "Keeper" takes on the subject of genetic planning and the prospect of procreating babies for health purposes.


How to Be Lost
AMANDA EYRE WARD

READER'S GUIDES

JODI PICOULT


HOW SOCCER EXPLAINS THE WORLD
FRANKLIN FOER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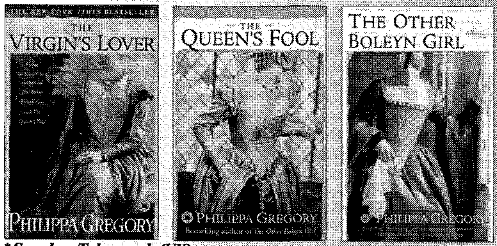
THE VIRGIN'S LOVER
PHILIPPA GREGORY
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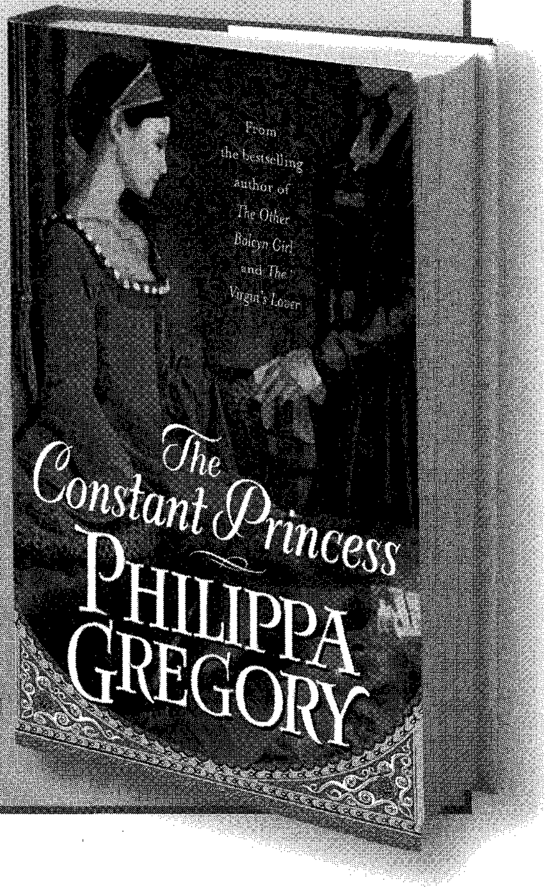
From the bestselling author of The Other Boleyn Girl and The Virgin's Lover
The Constant Princess
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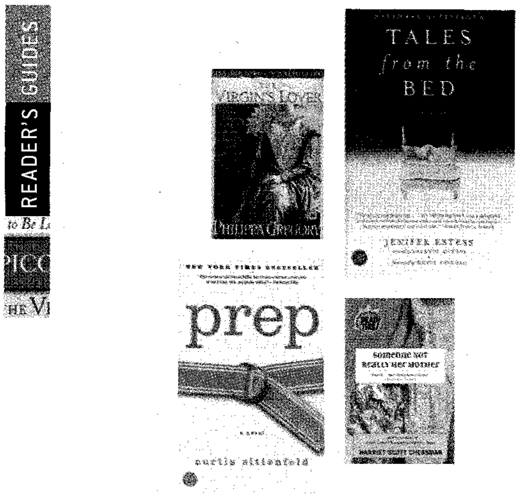
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PHILIPPA GREGORY
TALES from the BED
JENIFER ESTESS
prep
curtis sittenfeld
Someone Not Really Her Mother
HARRIET SCOTT CHESSMAN

(Starting the Discussion continued)

- What might children teach the adults in this novel? Which adult needs lessons most?
- Has this novel changed any of your opinions about other conflicts in bioethics like stem-cell research or genetically manipulated offspring?

PREP

Curtis Sittenfeld

(Reader's Circle—Ballantine/Random House)

Lee Fiora is an Indiana teenager who wins a scholarship to a prestigious East Coast boarding school. Through her eyes, we see the triumphs and defeats of adolescence.

- How does Lee Fiora's point of view relate to your own high-school experience?
- How does Lee's adolescence compare to your own? Which of her high-school experiences resonate with you most?

SOMEONE NOT REALLY HER MOTHER

Harriet Scott Chessman (Plume)

A survivor of the Second World War, French-born Hannah Pearl battles Alzheimer's while in a nursing home.

- How does Hannah Pearl's loss of memory and inability to find the right words enhance the narrative?
- How do the different points of view enrich the story?

TALES FROM THE BED

Jenifer Estess (Washington Square Press)

From the time she's diagnosed with A.L.S. up to her death, Estess chronicles her struggles with the disease, along with her liberating relationship with Reed, and the work of Project A.L.S., an organization she founded.

- Do you think running Project A.L.S. had an impact on Jenifer's health? Discuss the role of work in maintaining a sense of well-being.
- How does the theme of romantic love figure into how Jenifer views her own illness? What does Reed symbolize to Jenifer?

THE VIRGIN'S LOVER

Philippa Gregory (Touchstone)

In the first year of her reign, Queen Elizabeth I pouts, fumes, and relentlessly schemes as she finds herself in a love triangle with Sir Robert Dudley, son of a traitorous family, and his secretly Catholic wife, Amy.

- Does Dudley truly care about Elizabeth, or is his courtship of her to satisfy his own ambition?
- Elizabeth, believing she is being pursued by an assassin, seeks safety with Dudley at Kew. How does this encounter mark a turning point in their relationship?

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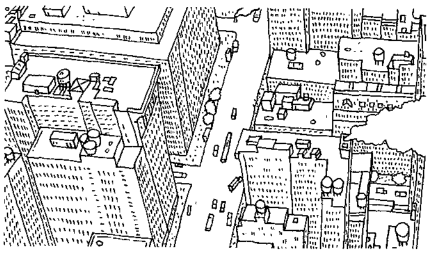
from his study-group friends, he joined a different circle of boys. During the next several years, he said, he watched as bin Laden and the others in his former group, who continued to study with the Syrian, openly adopted the styles and convictions of teen-age Islamic activists. They let their young beards grow, shortened their trouser legs, and declined to iron their shirts (ostensibly to imitate the style of the Prophet's dress), and, increasingly, they lectured or debated other students at Al Thagher about the urgent need to restore pure Islamic law across the Arab world. It is unclear whether the Syrian teacher was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood or was simply influenced by some of its ideas about political activism and violent jihad against unbelievers; his whereabouts today are unknown. Bin Laden's schoolmate said the teacher left Al Thagher twenty-five years ago.

Khaled Batarfi is a soft-spoken man in his mid-forties who works as a senior editor at *Al Madina,* an Arabic-language newspaper in Jedda, and who also writes a weekly column for *Arab News,* an English-language paper in the city. He earned a doctoral degree at the University of Oregon and, since September 11, 2001, has become an occasional interlocutor for American journalists and diplomats who visit the kingdom. Batarfi is sometimes invited to participate in foreign-policy seminars sponsored by the United States government; last month, he joined a roundtable discussion in Jedda with Liz Cheney, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, and a daughter of Vice-President Cheney's. In addition to his work as a Saudi political journalist and commentator, Batarfi has emerged during the past several years as a source of detailed, firsthand information about bin Laden as a teen-ager. He has talked about his recollections of Osama and has published an interview with bin Laden's mother, and remains in touch with other members of the family.



In 1971, Batarfi moved in a few doors down from bin Laden, and they played on the same club soccer team. (When he could, Batarfi said, he encouraged bin Laden to play forward, so that the tall youth could use his head to send balls into the opposing team's goal.) Although Batarfi did not attend Al Thagher, he saw bin Laden frequently during Osama's years there. Over the course of several interviews, Batarfi told me that he witnessed his friend's emergence during those years, at about age fifteen or sixteen, as an increasingly committed schoolyard Islamic activist. "In Al Thagher, he was part of an Islamic group," Batarfi recalled. "He was a prominent member. . . . That group was influenced by the Brotherhood. He was influenced by this philosophy."

Batarfi's recollection is corroborated by Jamal Khashoggi, a former acquaintance of bin Laden's who is now an adviser to Prince Turki al-Faisal, the Saudi Ambassador to the United States. The longtime Middle East correspondent Jonathan Randal, in his 2004 book, "Osama," quoted Khashoggi as saying that Osama "grew up as a Muslim Brother" and did not split from the movement until the mid-nineteen-eighties. The Brotherhood's influence on bin Laden was particularly striking, Batarfi told me, because the movement's emphasis on the need for political transformation in the Muslim world differed from the more introspective Islamic theology then prevalent in Saudi Arabia.

The kingdom's dominant school of Islam is often called Wahhabism by non-Saudis, in reference to Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab, an eighteenth-century desert preacher who allied himself with the al Saud family when it first established political control over the Arabian Peninsula, and whose descendants are still among Saudi Arabia's most important official clergy. Many Saudis reject the term "Wahhabism" as pejorative; they regard Wahhab's ideas as Islam itself, properly interpreted, and they argue that no other label is required. Some Saudis acknowledge their country's dominant theology as a distinct school of Islamic thought, but they will typically refer to

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this school as Salafism, a term that refers to the beliefs and practices of the earliest followers of Islam. With some exceptions, adherents of the Salafi school steer away from purposeful political organizing; instead, they often emphasize matters of personal faith, such as the strict regulation of Islamic rituals, and of an individual's private conduct and prayer. Bin Laden's group at Al Thagher, Batarfi said, was influenced to some extent by Salafi ideas, because there was no escaping the presence of such ideas in Saudi society, but bin Laden's group adopted "a more activist or a political agenda," as Batarfi put it, which was drawn largely from the Muslim Brotherhood's advocacy for political change in Islamic countries.

In this respect, bin Laden's years at Al Thagher appear to have been an intellectual prelude to his better-known experiences as a student at King Abdul Aziz University, in Jedda, where he studied during the late nineteen-seventies. At the university, bin Laden was influenced by several professors with strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood. Among them was Muhammad Qutb, an Egyptian, whose brother Sayyid Qutb had written one of the Brotherhood's most important tracts about anti-Western jihad, "Signposts on the Road." (Sayyid Qutb was hanged for treason by the Egyptian government in 1966.) Bin Laden's early exposure to the Brotherhood's ideas and recruiters may help to explain why later, in Afghanistan, he was attracted to the causes of so many Egyptian exiles, including his future deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri, whose experiences also included early exposure to the Muslim Brotherhood.

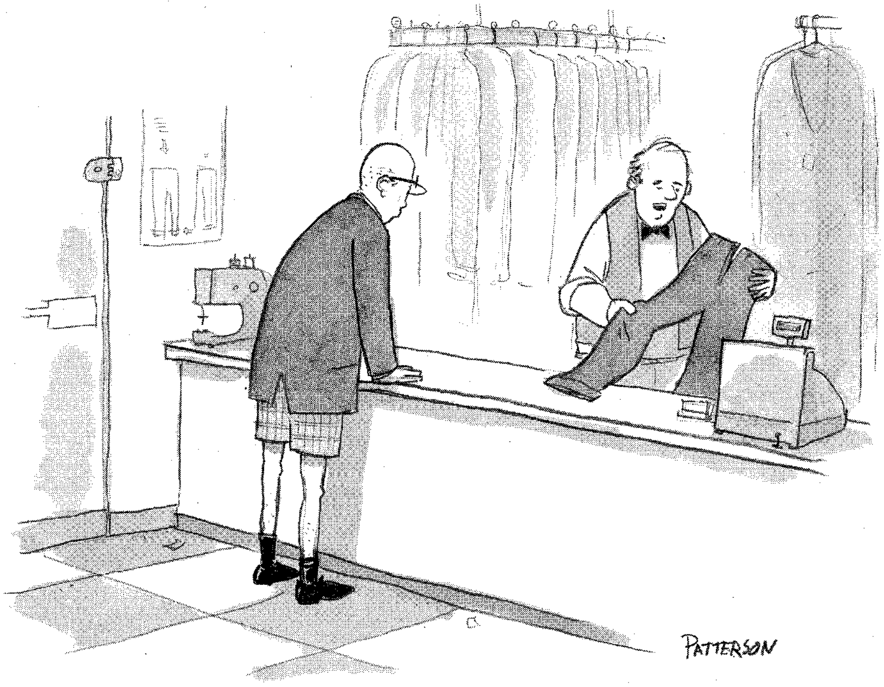
High school shaped bin Laden's future in another way as well. In Afghanistan, he worked at times with a former Al Thagher biology teacher, a Saudi named Ahmed Badeeb. During the nineteen-eighties, Badeeb took up a new job, as chief of staff for Prince Turki al-Faisal, who was then the head of Saudi intelligence and whose department, in collaboration with the C.I.A., sent hundreds of millions of dollars to support the Afghan war effort. In describing his occasional work with bin Laden on the Afghan frontier, Badeeb has said that they enjoyed a warm personal relationship, one that had its origins in their shared experiences at Al Thagher.

As a young man, bin Laden drove a white Chrysler and a gray Mercedes, often very fast, according to Batarfi. On occasion, he joined gatherings of the larger bin Laden clan. By the early nineteen-seventies, this group, on his father's side of the family, included a number of half brothers who had studied abroad, in places such as Lebanon and England. Some of Osama's older half brothers had travelled to Europe and, occasionally, the United States. The leader of this side of the family then was Muhammad bin Laden's eldest son, Salem, an ebullient, guitar-playing graduate of an English boarding school. By the mid-nineteen-seventies, Salem had acquired a private jet, and he travelled widely, to Switzerland, England, and Texas. At about that time, Osama's mother arranged for her teen-age son to marry a first cousin, who was from Syria.

The subject of Osama's youthful travels has been muddled by a number of accounts of his teen-age years, published shortly after September 11th. These have included reports, for example, that bin Laden attended boarding school in Lebanon, where he supposedly engaged in drinking and disco dancing. Some of bin Laden's half brothers did attend school in Lebanon, but no credible evidence has surfaced that Osama ever did. There have also been published reports that bin Laden joined his family on vacation in Sweden, and that he enrolled in a summer language course in England, but there is some uncertainty about these reports; several people who have met bin Laden say the reported trips amount to cases of mistaken identity.

Khaled Batarfi offered a new account of bin Laden's travels during the nineteen-sixties and seventies. He said that, as far as he knew, bin Laden had ventured outside the Middle East as a young man only three times. The first time, when he was about ten, he went to London with his mother to receive medical treatment for an eye condition. Bin Laden stayed in England for at least a month and did some sightseeing, according to Batarfi. On a second trip, as a teen-ager, bin Laden joined some friends and relatives on a big-game safari in East Africa. And, finally, according to Batarfi, Osama bin Laden made one trip to the United States, in about 1978.

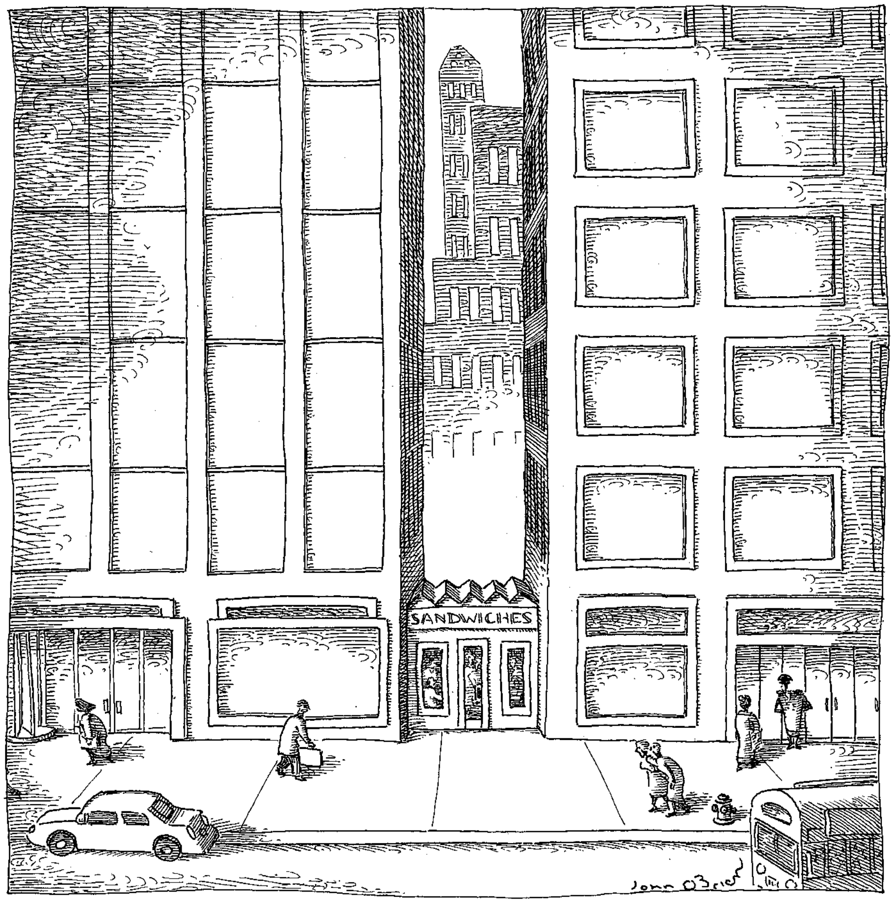
According to Batarfi, the trip to America came about because bin Laden's first child, a son named Abdullah, who was born in about 1976, had



"How soon do you need these?"

a medical problem—apparently cosmetic. Bin Laden, his wife, and his toddler son travelled together to the United States for treatment, Batarfi said, although he is not certain where the procedure took place. By his account, only one aspect of the journey made a particularly strong impression on bin Laden: On the way home, Osama and his wife were sitting in an airport lounge, waiting for their connecting flight. In keeping with their strict religious observance, his wife was dressed in a black *abaya*, a draping gown, as well as the full head covering often referred to as *hijab*. Other passengers in the airport "were staring at them," Batarfi said, "and taking pictures." When bin Laden returned to Jedda, he told people that the experience was like "being in a show." By Batarfi's account, bin Laden was not particularly bitter about all the stares and the photographs; rather, "he was joking about it."

If Batarfi is correct, bin Laden's American visit took place before he travelled to Afghanistan to participate in violent jihad, and about ten years before he founded Al Qaeda; it might never have surfaced in intelligence and law-enforcement investigations of bin Laden, which began in the mid-nineteen-nineties. Spokesmen at several government agencies, including the C.I.A. and the F.B.I., said that their Al Qaeda specialists had no information about a visit by bin Laden to the United States. A State Department spokesman said that its consular section had no record of ever having issued a visa to bin Laden, but that the department no longer has complete records of visas that were issued that long ago.



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Abdullah bin Laden, Osama's son, today lives in Jedda and enjoys good health, according to several people who know him. (He did not respond to requests for an interview.) In a story published in a London-based Saudi-owned newspaper in 2001, Abdullah said that he left his father's household in the mid-nineties, when Osama was preparing to leave Sudan, where he had been living in exile, for a new and uncertain exile in Afghanistan. Not wishing to endure such hardship any longer, Abdullah sought and received his father's permission to return to Saudi Arabia, where he has since taken up a career in advertising and public relations.

Abdullah runs his own firm, called Fame Advertising, which has offices near a Starbucks in a two-story strip mall on Palestine Street, one of Jedda's busiest commercial thoroughfares. "Fame . . . Is Your Fame" is the company's slogan, according to its marketing brochures. Among the firm's advertised specialties is "event management," which refers to the staging of attention-grabbing corporate galas and launch parties for new products or stores. The firm makes this promise: "Fame Advertising events are novel, planned meticulously, and executed with efficiency." On the back of this brochure is printed a single word: "Different."

Many Saudis follow the search for Abdullah's father with fascination, and this is particularly true of alumni of the Al Thagher Model School. Some of Osama's former classmates are now doctors or lawyers; others have followed their fathers into business. They use the Internet to stay in touch. On January 31, 2001, Al Thagher's Class of 1976 started a message group on Yahoo, where they exchange news about old friends and occasionally discuss questions about religion and politics, a participant told me. That Yahoo group requires a moderator's permission to join, but a second Al Thagher group for all alumni has publicly posted messages that give the flavor of the group's discussions, particularly in that autumn after the September 11th attacks. Posted message titles include "Taleban," "Northern Alliance Atrocities," "Salman Rushdie article," and, suggestively, "9 Unpopular Ideas, important to read."

Al Thagher's Class of 1976 is approaching the thirtieth anniversary of its graduation; no reunion has been scheduled. The class held its most recent reunion at a beach resort on the Red Sea. The party took place on a wintry night; in all, about fifty Al Thagher alumni turned up to mingle and share a meal. There was no word from Osama. ♦

THE SPORTING SCENE

YOUR MOVE

How computer chess programs are changing the game.

BY TOM MUELLER

Chrilly Donninger prefers to watch from a distance when Hydra, his computer chess program, competes, because he is camera-shy, but also because he rarely understands what Hydra is doing, and the uncertainty makes him nervous. During Hydra's match against the world's seventh-ranked player, Michael Adams, in London last June, Donninger sat with three grand masters at the back of a darkened auditorium, watching a video projection of the competition on the wall behind Adams. Most of the time, Donninger, a forty-nine-year-old Austrian, had little to worry about; Hydra won the match five games to none, with one draw. But in the second game, which ended in the draw, the program made an error that briefly gave its human opponent an advantage.

The game was played at a spotlit table on a low podium. Adams sat in the classic chess player's pose—his elbows resting on the table, his chin cupped in his palms—reaching out now and then with his right hand to move a piece on a large wooden chessboard. Across from him was Hydra—a laptop linked by Internet connection to a thirty-two-processor Linux cluster in Abu Dhabi—and Hydra's human operator, who entered Adams's moves into the computer and recorded the program's replies on the board. On the laptop's screen was a virtual chessboard showing the current position in the game, as well as a pane of swiftly scrolling numbers representing a fraction of the thousands of lines of play that Hydra was analyzing, and a row of colored bars that grew or shrank with each move, according to the program's assessment of who was winning—green bars meant an advantage for white, red bars for black.

For much of the match, the bars showed Hydra comfortably in the lead. When Adams made a mistake, they spiked dramatically, but mostly they grew in small increments, recording the tiny advantages that the program was steadily accumulating. Many of these were so subtle that Donninger and the grand masters failed to grasp the logic of Hydra's moves until long after they had been made. But about twenty minutes into the second game, when Hydra advanced its central e-pawn to the fifth rank, there was a small commotion in the group. Yasser Seirawan, an American player formerly ranked in the top ten, who had coached Adams for the match, gave a thumbs-up sign. Christopher Lutz, a German grand master who is Hydra's main chess adviser, groaned. Only Donninger, who programs chess far better than he plays it, was baffled. He turned to Lutz in alarm.

"What was that? What did you see?"

"Now our pawn structure has become inflexible," Lutz replied. "Do we have anything in the program for flexibility?"

"What do you mean by 'flexibility'?"

Lutz frowned. He sensed that Hydra had hemmed itself in, giving Adams the upper hand. Bishop to b7 was the correct move, Lutz believed—the most natural way for Hydra to preserve its attacking chances and its room to maneuver. But explaining his nebulous insights to a lesser player like Donninger was a challenge.

"This position lacks flexibility," he repeated, shaking his head.

"When you can define 'flexibility' in twelve bits, it'll go in Hydra," Donninger told him, twelve bits being the size of the program's data tables.

Adams locked up Hydra's center with his next move and managed, several hours later, to eke out a draw. "Hydra didn't play badly, but 'not bad' isn't good enough against a leading grand master," Donninger said after the game. His program is widely considered to be the world's

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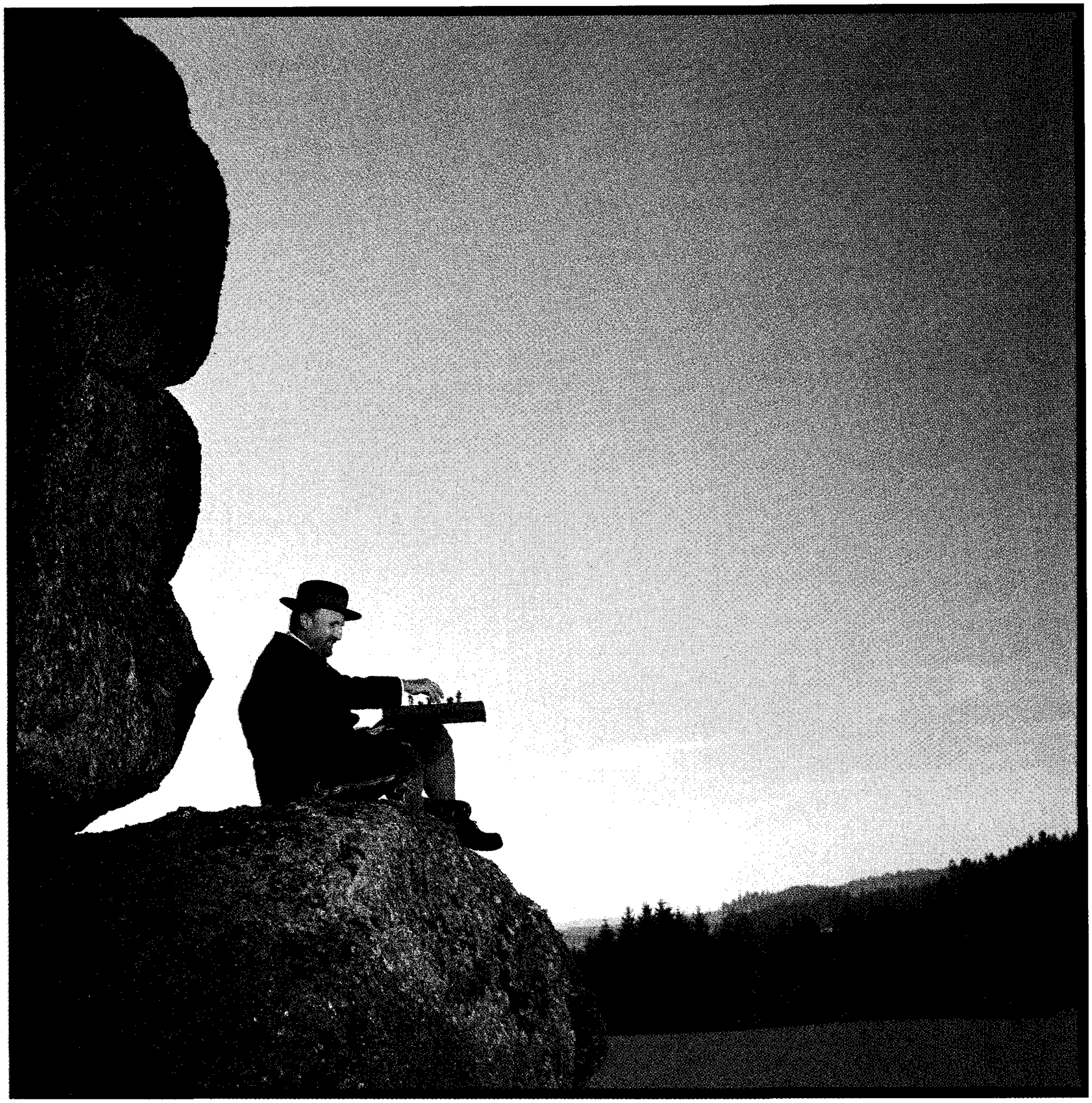

Chrilly Donninger's program Hydra is widely considered to be the world's strongest chess player. Photograph by Peter Rigaud.

strongest chess player, human or digital, but it still has room for improvement.

Lean and restless, with a scraggly beard and a large Roman nose, Donninger says that he approaches programming less like a scientist than like a craftsman—he compares himself to a *Madonnenschnitzer*, one of the painstaking Baroque and rococo wood-carvers whose Madonna sculptures adorn the churches near Altmelon, the village in northern Austria where he lives and works. He speaks German with a thick Austrian brogue and frequently uses expressions like "*Das ist mir Wurscht!*"—"That's all sausage to me!" For the past two years, he has led the Hydra project, a multinational team of computer and chess experts, which is funded by the Pal Group, a company based in the United Arab Emirates which makes computer systems, desalinization plants, and cyber cafés. Pal's owner, Sheikh Tahnoon bin Zayed al-Nahyan, is a member of the country's royal family and a passionate chess player; he hired Donninger with the goal of creating the world's best chess program. Pal is also using the same kind of hardware that runs Hydra for fingerprint-matching and DNA-analysis applications, which, like computer chess, require high-speed calculations. The program's main hardware resides in an air-conditioned room in Abu Dhabi, and Donninger is frequently unable to access it, because the Sheikh and Hydra, playing under the name zor_champ, are on the Internet, taking on all comers.

As a child, Donninger was so attached to puzzles that his mother worried that he was disturbed. At the age of four, he spent months building houses out of four colors of Lego bricks, in which no bricks of the same color ever touched;

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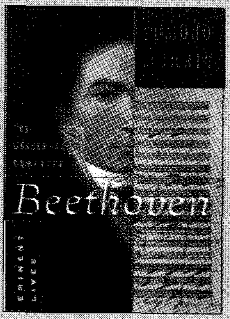

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ANTI-LOVE POEM

Sometimes you don't want to love the person you love
you turn your face away from that face
whose eyes lips might make you give up anger
forget insult   steal sadness of not wanting
to love   turn away then turn away   at breakfast
in the evening don't lift your eyes from the paper
to see that face in all its seriousness a
sweetness of concentration   he holds his book
in his hand   the hard-knuckled winter wood-
scarred fingers   turn away   that's all you can
do old as you are to save yourself from love

—*Grace Paley*

two decades later, when he was an undergraduate at the University of Vienna, he learned that this was a famous conundrum in topology—the Four-Color Problem. After completing a doctorate in statistics, he worked as a programmer for Siemens, where he earned a reputation as a bug fixer, the computer equivalent of a puzzler. In 1989, he was transferred to the Dutch city of Noordwijk. It was there, during a period of intense loneliness, that Donninger joined a local chess club, and started writing his first chess program. "I found my ecological niche," he says.

He had also found the ultimate puzzle. With about 10^{128} possible unique games—vastly more than there are atoms in the known universe—chess is one of mankind's most complex activities. In an average arrangement on the board, white has thirty-five possible moves and black has thirty-five possible replies, yielding twelve hundred and twenty-five potential positions after one full turn. With subsequent moves, each of these positions branches out exponentially in further lines of play—1.5 million positions after the second turn, 1.8 billion after the third—forming a gigantic map of potential games that programmers call the "search tree."

How human beings confront this complexity and seize on a few good moves remains a mystery. Experienced players rely on subconscious faculties known variously as pattern recognition, visualization, and aesthetic sense. All are forms of educated guesswork—aids to making choices when certainty through exhaustive calculation is impossible—and may be summed up in a word: intuition. Even a novice player uses intuition to exclude most moves as pointless, and the more advanced a player becomes the less he needs to calculate. As the eminent Cuban grand master José Raúl Capablanca once told a weaker player, "You figure it out, I know it."

Computers have the advantage of formidable analytical power, but even the fastest machine is quickly overwhelmed by the sheer number of moves that it must assess. (Donninger estimates that Hydra would need 10^{30} years to "solve" chess, starting from the first move and analyzing all possible sequences of play.) To produce world-class chess of the sort that Hydra played against Michael Adams, programmers must somehow teach their machines intuition.

This turns out to be a highly personal task, which every programmer approaches differently. Stefan Meyer-Kahlen, a thirty-seven-year-old German who wrote the four-time world-champion program Shredder, was inspired by Anatoly Karpov, the Russian player known for his calm, ruthlessly logical play and his masterly defense. Amir Ban and Shay Bushinsky, Israeli programmers who created Junior, another four-time world champion, draw on a large collection of computer chess games to shape their program's style. "We don't use grandmaster games for this, because they're too full of errors," says Ban, who made a fortune in the nineteen-nineties as an entrepreneur in flash memory. (Bushinsky is a professor of computer science and artificial intelligence, or A.I., at the University of Haifa.) Ban and Bushinsky believe that their method accounts for Junior's "speculative" play—its keen understanding of time and space, and its unrivalled knack for sacrifice—and they gleefully describe how Junior trounced an early version of Hydra two years ago, because Hydra (or, rather, Donninger) had badly misjudged a position. (Ban and Donninger detest one another, and, after getting into a shouting match at a tournament in 1997, they no longer speak.)

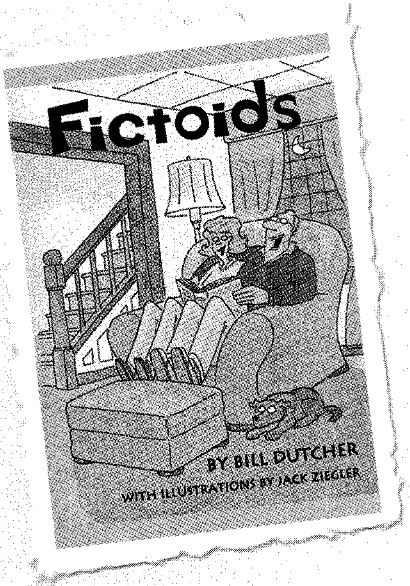
Hydra is famous for its relentless assault on the enemy king. "It's the Rottweiler of computer chess," Donninger says proudly. "It floats like a butterfly, stings like a hornet." He says that he has tried to endow the program with the slashing, sacrificial style of the former world champion Mikhail Tal. Yet Hydra's fighting spirit is as much Donninger's as Tal's. As a boy, Donninger fought constantly in school, analyzed each of Muhammad Ali's matches, and taught his younger sister an Ali-inspired uppercut to ward off bullies. In his twenties, he fought as a junior welterweight in a top Vienna gym. Occasionally, he pulls on a worn pair of boxing gloves and hammers away at a heavy bag that hangs from a beam on the side of his house.

Hydra, Shredder, Junior, and Fritz—another top program—routinely defeat leading grand masters, each playing with a distinctive personality that reflects not only its inventor's particular approach to chess and programming, but also moves and tactics that seem to arise spontaneously from intricacies of the computer code, which the programmer himself often cannot explain. Over the past decade, these programs, which typically sell for about sixty dollars and run on a P.C., have become essential tools for grand masters to analyze past games, test opening lines, and generate new ideas. (Hydra is not commercially available, in part because of its specialized hardware; some programs, including versions of the reigning world champion, Zappa, can be downloaded, free, from the Internet.) In the past several years, these programs have begun to play the kind of elegant, creative chess once thought to be the exclusive province of humans. Computers are allowing people to look more deeply into the game than ever before. They are even helping people to play more like machines.

The first chess automaton was, like Hydra, created as a diversion for royalty. In 1769, the engineer Wolfgang von Kempelen built "the Turk" for the Hapsburg ruler Maria Theresa. A robed and turbaned mannequin seated at a large desk, the Turk toured Europe and America for decades, trouncing all but the best players; according to one story, it beat Napoleon so badly that he swept the pieces from the board in disgust. Though the Turk's mechanical components were impressive—it had elaborate, whirring gears and could nod, roll its eyes, and lean over the board as if in concentration—its human component was decisive: it was secretly operated by a skilled chess player curled up inside the desk.

The first real chess-playing machine was designed in the late nineteen-forties by the British mathematician Alan Turing, who, in 1950, in the paper in which he proposed the famous Turing Test, identified chess as an ideal proving ground for machine intelligence. Since computers were not yet widely available, Turing acted as his own central processing unit, laboriously working out each move on paper. With the advent of computers a few years later, chess became the darling of the A.I. community. The game was enormously complex, had simple rules, and, unlike many objects of scientific research, provided an unambiguous way to measure results: the more a program won, the smarter it was thought to be. In broad terms, the early programs of the nineteen-fifties and sixties worked the way Hydra and its peers do today. They consisted of a search function, which sifted through the tree of possible moves, and an evaluation function, which applied a score to positions that arose along the way, awarding bonuses for good characteristics and penalties for bad. The move leading to the highest-scoring position would be selected.

The first chess programmers attempted to use the same intuitive strategies in search and evaluation that people employed when playing chess. However, their translations of human rules of thumb—control the center, don't move your queen too early—into programming language proved too crude to produce good chess. Worse, the more



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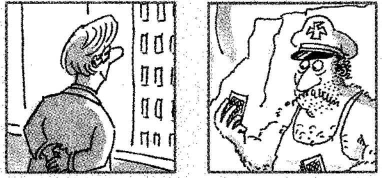

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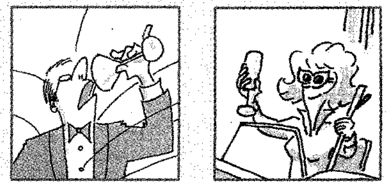

VISIT
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"I'm like most people, I guess—a mixture of good and bad."

• •

knowledge the programmers built into the search function, the slower the search became, which limited how deeply the program could see into a position—its "search horizon." The first programs were characterized by nonexistent strategy, embarrassing endgame technique, and a remarkable gift for blunders. In 1956, the MANIAC, a nuclear-weapons computer at Los Alamos, lost to a human opponent, even though the rules had been simplified and it had been spotted a queen. Mikhail Botvinnik, a former world champion, tried to write a program that thought the way he did, but it never won a game in tournament play.

A breakthrough came in the late nineteen-seventies, with the advent of "brute force" programming, which traded selectivity for speed. By paring back chess knowledge, emphasizing search algorithms like alpha-beta pruning, and exploiting faster hardware, programmers were able to consider a far broader search tree. Computers began to beat master players in the early eighties, and in 1988 Deep Thought became the first program to defeat a grand master. The brute-force approach culminated in 1997, when Deep Thought's successor, Deep Blue, a multimillion-dollar I.B.M. supercomputer that could evaluate two hundred million positions per second, won a six-game match against Garry Kasparov, the world champion.

Computers had triumphed at chess not by aping human thought, as most A.I. experts had expected, but by playing like machines. The analogy with flight is instructive: as long as people tried to fly by imitating birds, attaching diaphanous wings to their arms and flapping madly, they were doomed to failure; once they escaped the paradigm of the familiar, however, they were soon flying much faster than birds. Yet something still seemed to be missing. Programmers had made the most of computers' computational superiority, but many experts agreed that humans retained the edge in strategy. After Deep Blue's victory, A.I. researchers lost interest in chess, largely because brute-force methods seemed too crude and mechanical to shed much light on the nature of intelligence. "'Brute force' was a derogatory term," recalls Jonathan Schaeffer, a computer scientist who is the author of several chess programs and the world-champion checkers program Chinook. "You were considered a heretic if you didn't try to emulate the human brain."

By the late nineties, most chess programming was done not for mainframes but for much slower microcomputers and, subsequently, for P.C.s. Even today, the fastest P.C. programs can analyze only about four million positions per second, a fraction of Deep Blue's capacity. In order to achieve world-class results at these speeds, programmers needed to find ways of searching more selectively and evaluating more precisely. Over the past several years, the most gifted programmers have learned how to distill the more arcane principles of grand-master play into computer language. Some have identified principles that grand masters never imagined.

Donninger reviews Hydra's errors alone or with Christopher Lutz, trying to define each problematic position in twelve bits' worth of questions, which he can incorporate into Hydra's code. "Sometimes it would be nice to have more questions to work with," Donninger says. "But then you'd risk diluting the essential characteristics of the position with less vital information. Twelve bits is good discipline." Because these questions determine how Hydra will play, Donninger won't reveal most of them; a few, however, are more or less the same for all programs. The questions that Hydra uses to assess the value of a passed pawn are: "Is this a passed pawn?" (1 bit); "Is the square in front of it blocked?" (1 bit); "Which row is it on?" (3 bits); "Is it supported by a neighboring pawn?" (1 bit); "Is it supported by a neighboring pawn that is itself a passed pawn?" (1 bit); "Is it an advanced passed pawn?" (1 bit); "Is the enemy king inside the pawn's square?" (1 bit); and "Which phase of the game are we in?" (3 bits).

Once Donninger is satisfied that he has the right questions, he enters them into Hydra's evaluation function as a new heuristic, or chess rule. Hydra, like all other chess software, has hundreds of heuristics woven into its code, where they behave like DNA, shaping the program's personality. The Hydra code for evaluating a passed pawn, written in the computer language Verilog, looks like this:

```
if(iwPA7) begin
    wBlocked_A<=!iEmptyA8;
    wPassed_A<=1’b1;
    wSupported_A<= iwPB6;
    wDuo_A<=(iwPB7);
    wBack_A<=1’b0;
    wMaxRow_A<= 3’h6;
    wPRow_A<=3’h6;
    wLever_A<=1’b0;
end
```

How the heuristics interact, reinforcing and overriding one another, is mysterious; even a slight adjustment to a single rule can produce side effects that the programmer cannot predict. After Donninger adds a new rule, he runs a long series of test matches to determine whether it works, pitting the new version of Hydra against other programs. If the new Hydra wins more often than its predecessor, the new heuristic stays. Donninger says that for each new rule he needs about three months to work out unexpected kinks. (By contrast, Ban and Bushinsky sometimes tweak Junior's code right up to the start of a game. "We like to change things, take risks, improvise," Bushinsky says. "Maybe this is not so smart sometimes—it's considered a real no-no in computer science. But that's how we work. Maybe we do have an instinct for the program, sense something about how it feels.")

Today, the best programs blend knowledge and speed so effectively that even the most talented human players have little chance of defeating them. In 2003, Fritz and Junior fought Garry Kasparov to a draw in tense multi-game matches. A round-robin event in October, 2004, pitting Hydra, Fritz, and Junior against three leading grand masters, ended in an 8½–3½ victory for the computers. The machines' superiority was most obvious during the Hydra-Adams match in London. "Adams was simply pushed off the board by a much stronger opponent," says David Levy, an international master who watched the event.

Donninger is no longer interested in man-versus-machine matches. "I see the same pattern in each game," he says. "I call it Chrilly's Law: every ten moves, at the most, in complicated positions, even the strongest player will commit a slight inaccuracy—the second-best move when only the best will do. He doesn't even notice it, but Hydra does. Its evaluation bars start growing, a little taller with every move. By the time the grand master realizes the problem, it's already Game Over." Many chess players and programmers would like to see a match between Hydra and Kasparov, who has officially retired from chess to pursue a career as a politician in Russia but is still considered the ultimate opponent. "The world's greatest-ever human player against the world's greatest-ever computer player—we would all love to see it," Levy says. Donninger is indifferent to the idea. "I'm much more interested in beating Shredder, Fritz, and the other programs," he says. "I learn more from those matches."

In February, I watched Hydra play Shredder in one of the most sophisticated chess games in history, during the fourteenth International Computer Chess Championship. The tournament was held in Paderborn, Germany, in a shabby, fluorescent-lit conference room whose boisterous disarray often suggested a tailgate party more than a competition. Sixteen contestants sat chatting in pairs at small tables laden with computers, chess sets, beer, coffee, and half-eaten hunks of strudel. The programs reflected their authors' whims: one sounded a gong with every move, others displayed photos—of a pet falcon in one case, a scantily clad starlet in another. "They're extensions of our egos," Vincent Diepeveen, the author of Diep, a Dutch program, said.

Donninger and Hydra sat at a table in the middle of the room, the laptop draped with a U.A.E. flag and Donninger in his game-day outfit, which he wore on all five days of the tournament: black jeans, dirty white clogs, and a gray cardigan with deerhorn buttons. Across from him was Shredder and its inventor, Meyer-Kahlen, a round-faced man with a melodious tenor voice who is the only professional chess programmer not affiliated with a larger organization, and is widely admired by his peers. "He does everything himself—the program, the user interface, sales, technical support," Donninger says. "No one knows how he manages to stay at the top."

The game started with a handshake, a custom in matches between grand masters, and continued for about twenty minutes with a chatty congeniality unthinkable in competitive chess. Once a game begins, programmers are not permitted to adjust their programs, but there is no rule against sharing information. Donninger and Meyer-Kahlen turned their screens so that each could see from the scrolling numbers and colored bars what the other's program was thinking, and speculated aloud about their programs' prospects. When Donninger recorded the wrong move on the board, Meyer-Kahlen politely corrected it. However, as the position became complicated both men grew quiet

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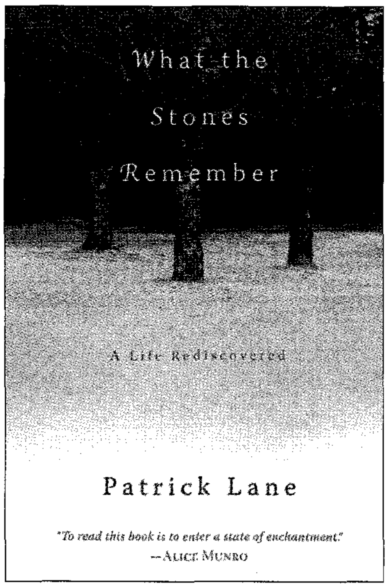

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and stone-faced, their eyes fixed on the screens. Other programmers drifted away from their matches and gathered in a tight circle around the table.

"What a stupid sport!" Donninger snapped, as the programs jockeyed for infinitesimal advantages. "We're completely helpless. It's like riding shotgun in a Formula One race car."

Ninety minutes into the game, most of the pieces were still on the board, arranged in an intricate logjam. Shredder was happy with the position, but so was Hydra; evidently one of the programs was mistaken. Then Shredder attacked Hydra's kingside, with a risky pawn advance that seemed to expose Shredder's own king. "*Scheisse!*" Meyer-Kahlen exclaimed. "What the devil is Shredder doing?"

The situation was critical, but neither programmer knew who was winning. Nor did anyone in the crowd around the table, which included the two grand masters on the Hydra team, Christopher Lutz and Talib Mousa.

"*Unklar*," Lutz murmured, when I asked him what he thought of the position.

Donninger's face brightened for a moment. "'Unclear' is a grand master's way of saying, 'Who the hell knows?'"

The uncertainty persisted for several more moves. Then, suddenly, it became obvious that Shredder was on the verge of being checkmated. Nevertheless, the program made a queenside pawn push, just as Hydra was cornering its king on the other side of the board.

"Oh, Shredder, what kind of a crap move is that?" Meyer-Kahlen said. Eight moves later, he reached abruptly across the board to shake Donninger's hand, resigning the game. Then he stalked away from the table.

Afterward, while Mousa recounted the match to Sheikh Tahnoon on a cell phone, Lutz and Donninger reviewed the game at the chessboard. "We're trying to understand what happened and why," Donninger said wearily.

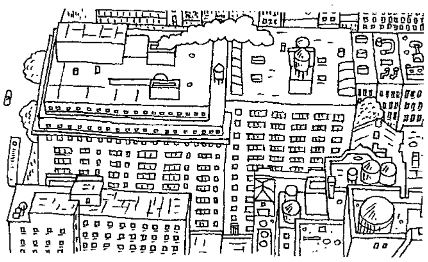
It is now plausible to argue that computers are playing subtler, more imaginative chess than the humans they have been designed to emulate. "They make a lot of counterintuitive, even absurd-looking, moves that on closer inspection can turn out to be outrageously creative," says John Watson, an international master who has written more than twenty-five books on advanced chess theory and strategy. "By generating countless new ideas, they are expanding the boundaries of chess, enabling top players to study the game more deeply, play more subtly." Viswanathan Anand, a thirty-five-year-old Indian who is currently rated the world's top active player, often uses several chess programs simultaneously when he trains. "I have Shredder, Fritz, Junior, and HIARCS"—another popular program—"running all the time so I can see their various opinions, which are often very different," he says. "When a position catches my fancy, we compare notes." In some cases, computers are rewriting the game's ground rules. "Certain endgames that for centuries were unanimously thought to be draws have actually proved to be clear wins," says John Nunn, a player formerly ranked in the top ten whose groundbreaking books on endgames were the first to be written using extensive computer analysis. "Computers helped me to discover a number of fundamentally new positions that no one had ever expected, some of which were outstandingly beautiful," he says.

Chess programs are even having a psychological impact. Because computers feel neither nervousness nor fear, they are able to defend apparently hopeless positions, which has encouraged human opponents to persevere even when defeat seems inevitable. The seventeen-year-old American champion Hikaru Nakamura recently told the *Times* that he plays with the courage of a computer. "I'll play some of these really crazy moves that people are not going to be expecting," he said. "The way I play is not like most people. The moves are more computeresque."

Shay Bushinsky and Amir Ban believe that computeresque is better. "Many people don't like it when I say this, but I think Junior plays more creatively than humans," Bushinsky says. Ban goes further, insisting that Junior's creativity is a symptom of its inherent intelligence. "This is an emergent phenomenon of the program, not something I put into it," he says. "It's like Junior is the child and I'm the father. I may think I've taught my child everything, but it's constantly dreaming up things that surprise me."

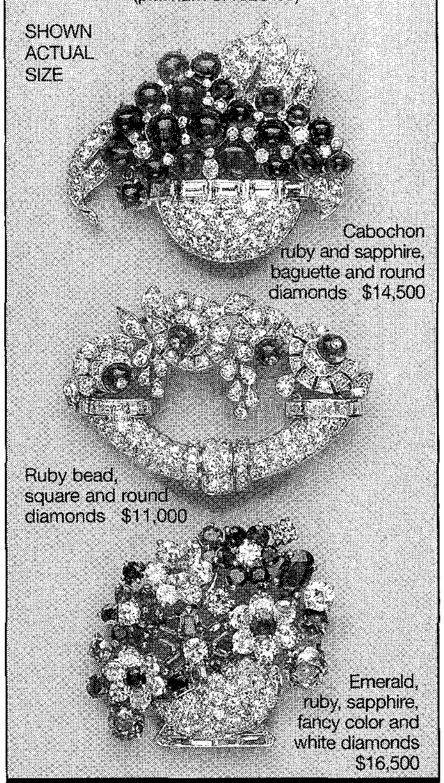
Such claims to creativity and intelligence are not that far-fetched. In the last few decades, scholars of emergent phenomena have revealed how simple rules at work in termite mounds, traffic jams, quantum mechanics, and the structure of galaxies can give rise to sophisticated and unanticipated behavior, just as the few basic rules of chess yield the endlessly subtle game played by grand masters and chess programs. Scientists have found that the best way to understand these complex systems is often not to theorize but to build a computer model and see how it behaves, in the same way that a chess programmer writes a new version of his program and then watches it play. As the model exhibits patterns and behaviors whose existence its programmer never suspected, it is, in some real sense, creating. And while this may not constitute true machine intelligence, a growing number of cognitive scientists and philosophers see no fundamental distinction between computers and human brains. "Sure, I think the brain is a machine," Mark Greenberg, a philosopher of mind at U.C.L.A., says. "And, likewise, that there's no reason in principle that a computer couldn't think, have beliefs and other mental states, be intelligent. Many mainstream philosophers would agree."

Some, of course, do not. John Searle has tried to disprove the notion of machine intelligence with his "Chinese Room" thought experiment, and Roger Penrose has used Gödel's ideas to the same end. The philosopher Colin McGinn argues that consciousness itself, a crucial part of intelligence, is cognitively closed to us. Yet for those who view intelligence as something essentially and almost mystically human, the analogy with flight may provide a salutary warning. In October, 1903, just two months before the Wright brothers completed their first successful powered flight, the astronomer Simon Newcomb published an essay attempting to prove that airplanes would never fly. He got nearly everything right, identifying the intricate ratios of size, weight, and wing surface in birds which proved that a man-size bird could never get airborne. Yet he overlooked one key detail—the lift effect of an airfoil—and the larger point that an airplane was not a bird. Might those who appear to require a human brain for intelligence be overlooking a broader but no less valid definition of the term?



In any event, such metaphysical matters can be neatly sidestepped with the Turing Test, which merely asks whether a machine can imitate intelligence well enough to fool a human observer. In 2000 and 2001, the leading British grand master Nigel Short played a number of speed-chess games on the Internet, against an anonymous opponent. In most games, this player put himself at a disadvantage with several bizarre opening moves, yet went on to trounce Short, who is among the world's best speed-chess players. Short became convinced that his quirky, brilliant opponent was the reclusive chess genius Bobby Fischer—who else could beat him with such superhuman ease? "I am ninety-nine per cent sure that I have been playing against the chess legend," he told the London *Sunday Telegraph*. "It's tremendously exciting." He said that he treasured these games as products of Fischer's rare art. "To me, they are what an undiscovered Mozart symphony would be to a music lover."

In fact, Short's opponent was probably a computer. "It's fairly clear that the phantom Fischer was an experienced chess-program user playing a practical joke," Frederic Friedel, a founder of ChessBase, a software company that publishes Fritz, Junior, and several other programs, says. "He made the first few absurd moves by hand to throw people off the scent, then unleashed the machine." When Friedel played through several of the games with Fritz, the program's moves were virtually identical to those of Short's mystery opponent. So a computer duped one of the world's top chess players into believing that it was a human. Friedel says that the converse also happens. "Raffael," one of the strongest players at his company's popular chess server Playchess.com, was originally thought to be a powerful computer, but was later observed making all-too-human errors. "Raffael" is now believed by many to be Garry Kasparov. ♦



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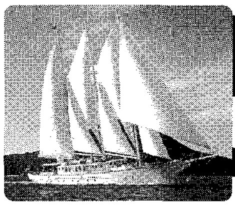

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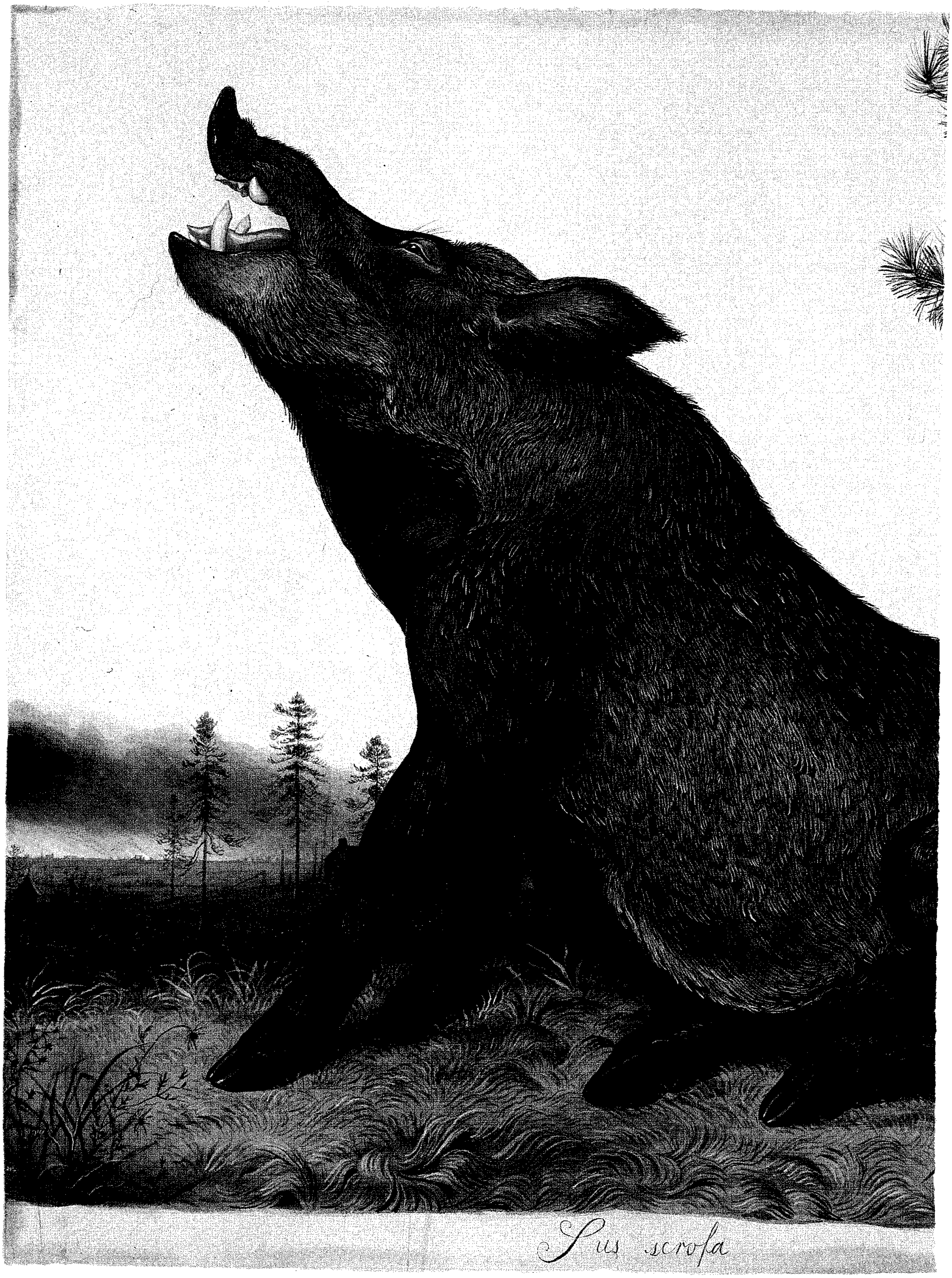


The South is wild-hog-positive from the Rio Grande in West Texas to the coast of the Carolinas, with only a few counties still hog-f

nting by Walton Ford.

OUR FAR-FLUNG CORRESPONDENTS

HOGS WILD

Suddenly, feral swine are everywhere.

BY IAN FRAZIER

Of all the domesticated animals, none become feral more readily, or survive better in the wild, than the hog. Of all the larger animals, none reproduce as quickly and abundantly as the hog. The combination of the first fact with the second means that the number of wild hogs in the United States—maybe four and a half million, maybe five—is unlikely to go down. The wild hog is an infestation machine. The Great Smoky Mountains National Park, in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, has today a population of about five hundred wild hogs. Since 1977, when the park began a policy of trying to reduce the number of its hogs, its hog-control officers have removed about ten thousand hogs. When hunted, wild hogs often become nocturnal. They are as smart as, or smarter than, dogs. A study done in South Carolina found that catching wild hogs in traps required about twenty-nine man-hours per hog. Past a certain point, removing hogs is too expensive and hard on the environment to be worthwhile. Like other places (not including some islands) that have wild hogs, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park has no expectation that it will ever get rid of its hogs.

A maker of fences in the nineteenth century advertised a new kind of fence as being "bull-strong, horse-high, and pig-tight." In fact, as regards pigs, few fences ever are. Pigs root under, wriggle through. They have been getting away since people first domesticated the species *Sus scrofa* in Asia and the Middle East nine thousand to ten thousand years ago. When archeologists find an ancient pig skull, they try to tell by certain measurements of the upper second molar whether the pig was tame or wild. The original *Sus scrofa*, the Eurasian wild boar, has a longer snout than domestic swine and thus a different spacing of teeth in the jaw. (The wild boar is also taller, narrower, and rangier, with bristly hairs standing up along its spine, and a straight rather than a curly tail.) Often, though, the ancient pig skull has indeterminate, gray-area molar measurements, and it's impossible to tell which side of the fence the pig was on.

In the United States, the wild hogs with the longest pedigree are descended from ones that escaped from Polynesian Islanders who first brought pigs to the Hawaiian Islands in about 750 A.D. This strain eventually reinvigorated itself by crossbreeding with escapees from later Hawaiian settlers; many places in the Islands have a vexing wild-pig problem today. The first feral pigs in continental North America deserted from the expedition of Hernando de Soto, the Spanish explorer who crossed the Southeast to beyond the Mississippi River in 1539-42. Wild pigs that got away from Spanish colonists in Florida survived in the woods and swamps so successfully that today some of their descendants represent the only modern examples of old Spanish breeds that long ago disappeared in domestication.

In frontier times, farmers let their hogs run loose, then collected them with the help of dogs on butchering day. Many hogs chose to skip this event, naturally. After America became rich, circa 1890, sportsmen with money imported Eurasian wild boars to stock hunting preserves. When these animals escaped and crossbred with feral swine, they created a tougher and even better-adapted (some say) feral hog. The fact that wild swine have been living in America for centuries does not dissuade wildlife biologists from referring to them as a "non-native" species. Feral hogs of the species *Sus scrofa* live on every continent but Antarctica, and also on many islands and archipelagoes. Except in the original range of the Eurasian wild boar, feral hogs are non-native everywhere.

Tame or wild, hogs can eat anything

humans can eat, and plenty more. They find many different environments congenial. It is perhaps lucky for the planet that hogs have sebaceous glands that do not produce sweat; consequently, hogs need someplace cool and wet to wallow when the weather is hot. This means that very arid regions seem to be safe from hogs for the time being. The current American style of real-estate development—expanding horizontally, taking over rural areas, mallifying farmland, leaving only the soggy places and creek beds and river valleys more or less the same, and then passing ordinances prohibiting the discharge of firearms in the new municipalities—suits the hogs just fine. Plus, once in a while enterprising people who love to hunt hogs go to a swamp down South, live-trap a party of hogs, and transport them illegally north to a woods more convenient to the hog hunters' homes. The recent arrival of wild-hog populations in previously hog-free counties in Illinois and Indiana (among other places) probably came about in just this way, wildlife scientists believe.

In 1982, eighteen states in the U.S. had wild hogs. By 1999, nine more states had reported populations of them. By 2004, wild hogs could be found in twenty-eight states; three more have acquired wild hogs since then. States where there had been hogs all along also saw a sudden growth in wild-hog numbers beginning in the early nineteen-nineties. People who think about wild hogs wonder how far they will expand their range. "The number of states with wild hogs is going to continue to grow," says John J. Mayer, a wild-hog expert and the co-author of "Wild Pigs in the United States: Their History, Comparative Morphology, and Current Status," the definitive text. "We're going to wind up with populations in all fifty states eventually."

Well and good, or (more likely) not; but what you really want to know is "What about Hogzilla?" I understand your concern. The question comes up whenever one mentions the subject of feral hogs. People don't pronounce the name neutrally, either. There's always a pause, a kind of awed emphasis: "But what about this . . . Hog-*zilla*?!" It's a deeply resonant, latter-day American name: HOGZILLA. I am going to deal with the Hogzilla question now, so it won't be hanging over us.

Hogzilla is a phenomenon of the Internet, although he would have had a lively career in folklore even if he had existed long before. Hogzilla was a giant hog, said to be a wild hog from the swamps, who was shot and killed in June of 2004 on a fish farm/game ranch in south Georgia by an employee of the property named Chris Griffin. Griffin said that he was doing maintenance chores when he saw the beast emerge from the swamp onto the road, and he killed it with a single shot. An Internet photograph of Griffin next to the dead and upside-down-hanging Hogzilla was what caused all the commotion. I mean, that thing was *huge!* And tusked. And ugly. But the picture looked a little strange, also—possibly faked, though you couldn't be sure—like real hair that happens also to resemble a hairpiece, but, then again, maybe actually *is* a hairpiece . . . Griffin and Ken Holyoak, the property owner, explained in the accompanying story that the hog's meat proved to be unusable, so they buried the carcass soon after taking the photograph. Later news stories reported that they had put a white cross on the grave.

"So would anyone in the group care to respond to what Clifford has just shared with us?"

The subsequent excitement and Internet back-and-forth can be imagined. Griffin and Holyoak's claim that the hog had been a thousand pounds and more than twelve feet long aroused incredulity. In terms of size, hogs are more or less comparable with humans; a three-hundred-pound hog is a really big hog. And the fact that the pair had buried it rubbed people wrong. Wherever I went on my wild-hog explorations, someone would take me aside and confide, "If only they hadn't *buried* it. Something about that don't seem right."

The Hogzilla story, plus photo, happened to hit one of those deep veins whose existence isn't suspected until it appears. A minor Hogzilla craze ensued, with invitations to Griffin to be a guest on the "Tonight Show" with Jay Leno and on other TV and radio shows, and national news coverage, and a Hogzilla festival in the fall in the town of Alapaha, Georgia, near where Hogzilla died. The National Geographic Channel sent a documentary crew down to look into the tale. Hogzilla's grave was located, and guys in biohazard suits unearthed his remains and scientists examined them. They found that the hog had been seven and a half feet long, not twelve, and eight hundred instead of a thousand pounds—a big hog, if not quite a Hogzilla.

John J. Mayer, the wild-hog expert,

who was also called in, concluded that the hog had been pen-raised. The hog's long tusks (in the wild, boars break their tusks fighting over sows), its weight (that much food simply isn't available in the wild), and its hooves (their wear indicated a lot of time spent standing on concrete) contributed to Mayer's verdict. National Geographic played the story for thrills all the same, beginning the documentary, "Monsters—they haunt the dark places of our planet. . . . Now a new monster has emerged from the swamps of Georgia, in the southern U.S." When the documentary aired, last April, it drew the second-largest number of viewers of any program in the channel's history.

After Hogzilla came the predictable imitators. There was Hog Zelda, a huge sow; and the Big Hog, also allegedly feral, in central Florida, which apparently did weigh eleven hundred pounds. It is also sometimes called Hog Kong. A man said he shot it after he found it swimming in one of his stock ponds. John J. Mayer believes that this hog was also pen-raised.

"They say you're only as old as your face."

• •

Next question: What do wild hogs do that's so bad?

Oh, not much. They just eat the eggs of the sea turtle, an endangered species, on barrier islands off the East Coast, and root up rare and diverse species of plants all over, and contribute to the replacement of those plants by weedy, invasive species, and promote erosion, and undermine roadbeds and bridges with their rooting, and push expensive horses away from food stations in pastures in Georgia, and inflict tusk marks on the legs of these horses, and eat eggs of game birds like quail and grouse, and run off game species like deer and wild turkeys, and eat food plots planted specially for those animals, and root up the hurricane levee in Bayou Sauvage, Louisiana, that kept Lake Pontchartrain from flooding the eastern part of New Orleans, and chase a woman in Itasca, Texas, and root up lawns of condominiums in Silicon Valley, and kill lambs and calves, and eat them so thoroughly that no evidence of the attack can be found.

And eat red-cheeked salamanders and short-tailed shrews and red-back voles and other dwellers in the leaf litter in the Great Smoky Mountains, and destroy a yard that had previously won two "Yard of the Month" awards on Robins Air Force Base, in central Georgia, and knock over glass patio tables in suburban Houston, and muddy pristine brook-trout streams by wallowing in them, and play hell with native flora and fauna in Hawaii, and contribute to the near-extinction of the island fox on Santa Cruz Island off the coast of California, and root up American Indian historic sites and burial grounds, and root up a replanting of native vegetation along the banks of the Sacramento River, and root up peanut fields in Georgia, and root up sweet-potato fields in Texas, and dig big holes by rooting in wheat fields irrigated by motorized central-pivot irrigation pipes, and, as the nine-hundred-foot-long pipe advances automatically on its wheeled supports, one set of wheels hangs up in a hog-rooted hole, and meanwhile the rest of the pipe keeps on going and begins to pivot around the stuck wheels, and it continues and continues on its hog-altered course until the whole seventy-five-thousand-dollar system is hopelessly pretzeled and ruined.

Oh, them damned hogs. Noses with bodies and legs appendaged, bristled vacuum-cleaner bags attached to snouts, is what they are. The hogs' noses actually have a special bone in them called the nasal sesamoid bone, which is connected to the skull only by cartilage and which provides extra rooting support for the rhinarial disk—the pig's nose, the business end, with its two hypersentient, staring nostril holes. Wild pigs' noses soon become callused from rooting, and are generally muddy. Sometimes a pig will stop in the middle of rooting and raise its head and blow dirt out its nose. Pigs have a powerful and highly nuanced sense of smell. They can detect scent coming from as far away as seven miles cross-country, and from twenty-five feet underground.

To reach islands, wild hogs have been known to cross tracts of open ocean as much as two miles wide. They are very good at swimming, a skill their environment often requires. Floods seldom inconvenience them seriously. In Bayou Sauvage, the New Orleans wildlife refuge, wild hogs swam to high ground after the hurricane and came through fine. Shelley Stiaes, operations specialist at the refuge, says law-enforcement people who patrolled there after the hurricane dispatched a lot of hogs. "We've still got plenty of them, though," she says. "They could've shot a hundred without making a dent in how many hogs we've got here."

And the diseases! The parasites! A study done in 1982 found that wild hogs in the Southeast hosted thirty-two parasite species, from scabies to hog lice and various ticks, plus liver flukes, kidney worms, lungworms, tapeworms, and more. An official guide to wildlife diseases notes that many of these parasites are little threat to humans, though they do surprise hunters sometimes when they clean and dress the hogs and see what's inside. Among the most common wild-hog diseases are the pseudorabies virus, which causes abortions in adult sows and fever and death in piglets; and swine brucellosis, which also causes abortions, and also infertility and other reproductive symptoms. Oddly, the diseases wild swine carry don't seem to slow them down much but would be catastrophic if passed on to domestic swine.

In the interests of science, civilization, and good order, an élite team of veterinarians in Athens, Georgia, keeps tabs on the hogs. These veterinarians work for the Southeastern Coöperative Wildlife Disease Study—commonly known by its acronym, SCWDS, pronounced "*Skwid*-is"—part of the University of Georgia College of Veterinary Medicine. Sixteen states, most of them in the Southeast, fund the coöperative, but it studies diseases of wildlife all over the United States, paying special attention to diseases that also affect domestic animals, and to ones like West Nile virus and avian influenza that could be passed on to humans. SCWDS is like the Centers for Disease Control, only for wildlife. Its vets are unusually cool people. Many are Ph.D.s who research and write scientific papers at the top of their fields, yet are also able to spend weeks at a time in disagreeable near-wilderness swamps trapping and taking nasal swabs, blood, and tissue samples from hogs.

One day, I went to Athens and met Joe Corn, a senior wildlife biologist for SCWDS, who has trapped and studied thousands of wild hogs. Joe Corn is tall and lean, in his late forties, with curly dark hair and blue eyes that sometimes betray an unscientific amusement at the hogginess of wild hogs. For example, he was describing a type of wire pen used in trapping hogs, and he said that the pen had no ceiling and was of a height that one could lean over and look down at the hogs; but, he added, one should never do that. I asked why, and he said, "Because they'll jump up and bite your face." And that look—amusement combined with a sort of admiration—lit his eyes.

PRISONERS

In the preface to a translation of a German writer,
a poet I'd never heard of, I fall on the phrase
"He was a prisoner of war in a camp in the U.S.,"

and a memory comes to me of a morning
during the second war when my parents,
on a visit to the city they'd grown up in,

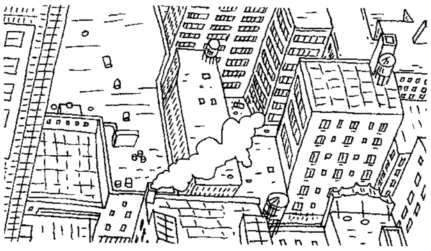
took me to what had been their favorite park
and was now a barbed-wire-encircled compound,
with unpainted clapboard barracks,

where men, in sandals and shorts,
all light-haired, as I recall, and sunburned,
idled alone or in small groups.

I'm told they're German prisoners, though I know
nothing of the war, or Hitler, or the Jews—
why should I?—I only remember them

gazing back at us with a disconcerting
incuriousness, a lack of evident emotion
I'd associate now with primates in zoos,

As disease vectors, wild hogs pose a greater danger if you don't know where they are. To counter this, SCWDS periodically does surveys of wild-hog populations nationwide and publishes maps with the results. Joe Corn unrolled two of these maps on his desk. Both were of the continental U.S., with insets for Alaska, Hawaii, and territorial islands. The first map, dated 1982, showed the feral-hog population centered in the Southeast and Texas, with a modest population in California and a few smaller groupings elsewhere. The latest map, current to 2004, portrayed a dramatically expanded situation. Now the lower South was wild-hog-positive from the Rio Grande in West Texas to the coast of the Carolinas, with only a few small blank areas indicating counties still hog-free. Above that, in the next tier of states northward, wild-hog counties were not as tightly massed, though still plentiful. Even farther north, in mostly hog-free states, counties shaded to show the presence of wild hogs appeared scattered but spreading, like burnings downwind of a forest fire. Joe Corn said that the SCWDS maps would be vital in the event of a disease outbreak carried or amplified by wild hogs.



As I leaned over the map and studied it with Joe Corn, suddenly my attention swerved. This map, with its intri-

and that my mother and father seemed unnerved,
at a loss for what to say, which I found
more disturbing than the prisoners, or the camp,

a reaction my mother must have sensed
because she took my hand and led me away—
the park had a carrousel, she took me there.

Are there still merry-go-rounds,
with their unforgettable oompah
calliope music and the brass rings?

If you caught one, you rode again free.
I never did, I was afraid to fall;
I'm not anymore, but it wouldn't matter.

I go back instead to those prisoners,
to the one especially not looking at us,
because he was shaving. Crouched on a step,

face lathered, a galvanized pail at his feet,
he held—I see it, can it be there?—
a long straight razor, glinting, slicing down.

—*C. K. Williams*

cate little counties and occasional whole states shaded green to highlight the potential disease-vector threat of wild hogs, reminded me of the red state–blue state map of America. At first glance, the states that voted for George Bush in 2004 and the states marked on this map as having feral hogs seemed to be one and the same. I mentioned this oddity to Joe Corn, who, scientist-like, declined to comment beyond the area of his expertise.

Afterward, I could not get this strange correspondence out of my mind. I compiled '04 red state–blue state data and matched it with SCWDS hog-population information on the map of that year. I found my first impression to be essentially correct. The presence of feral hogs in a state is a strong indicator of its support for Bush in '04. Twenty-three of the twenty-eight states with feral hogs voted for Bush. That's more than four-fifths; states that went for Kerry, by contrast, were feral-hog states less than a fifth of the time.

The solidly feral-hog South was, of course, solidly for Bush. The small islands there without wild hogs—Little Rock, Raleigh-Durham—voted for Kerry. Democrats who predicted a Kerry win in Florida in '04 might have been less confident had they known that all of Florida's sixty-seven counties, even its urban ones, have feral hogs. Texas, a gimme for Bush, is the state in the Union with the most feral hogs. Estimates of the feral-hog population in Texas are more than a million and a half, though nobody knows for sure. To go along with its high feral-hog numbers, Texas produced more than four and a half million votes for Bush in '04, the second-largest total of any state.

All the Northeastern states voted for Kerry. None of the Northeastern states have feral hogs—with one exception. That is New Hampshire, where Eurasian wild boars escaped from a game preserve years ago and now are on the loose in the mountains of Sullivan County, between Newport and Lebanon. Is it merely coincidence that New Hampshire (Kerry fifty per cent, Bush forty-nine per cent) is the Northeastern state Bush came closest to winning?

Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois are among the states that have acquired feral-hog populations since 1982. Of the twenty counties (all rural) that have feral hogs in those states, seventeen voted for Bush in '04. Ohio and Indiana both have more feral-hog counties than Illinois; Bush won Ohio and Indiana, lost Illinois.

A prominent feature of the red state–blue state map is the sweep of red coming up from Texas and the South through the center of the country. Experts say that feral hogs are starting to do the same. They have increased their numbers in Oklahoma and appeared in counties in Kansas and Nebraska, where they weren't previously. An A.P. news story from last year described packs of wild pigs tearing up yards and destroying crops in Sumner County, in south-central Kansas. People there speculated that the pigs were formerly domestic animals that had been turned loose when hog prices crashed some years before. Sumner County preferred Bush to Kerry in '04 by a margin of sixty-eight per cent to thirty-one per cent.

California, an important blue state, seems to go against the pattern, because fifty-seven of its fifty-eight counties have feral hogs. However, one must look below the surface to see the deeper significance of this state. Kerry did indeed win the popular vote in California, and the state's key electoral-vote total of fifty-five. But in this state, widely infested with feral hogs, 5,509,826 people voted for George Bush—the most of any state, more even than Texas—contributing vitally to the popular-vote win seen by Bush as mandate-bestowing.

It is tempting to say that the more feral hogs in a place, the greater the support for Bush. But, even for experts, accurate feral-hog numbers in specific counties are hard to come by. One *can* say, however, that in the deepest areas of feral hogdom support for Bush is extra strong. East Texas counties with chronic feral-hog problems went for Bush at two-thirds margins and above. Berrien County, Georgia, the county of the storied (but probably not wild) Hogzilla, preferred Bush by seventy to twenty-nine per cent. Wild hogs seem to be everywhere that the red-state red can't get any redder and starts to turn into a Confederate flag.

In northern New Jersey, where I live, the closest feral hogs are a state or two away. They're beyond the far end of Pennsylvania, in West Virginia, or

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SIPRESS

they're the renegade Eurasian wild boars up in New Hampshire. Near my house, in the commuting town of Montclair, I see the usual suburban deer, raccoons, opossum, squirrels, etc.; but I have encountered neither feral hogs nor rumors of feral hogs. True to the red-state feral-hog corollary, Montclair voted for Kerry by seventy-nine to twenty per cent. This near-unanimity of local opinion is O.K. with me. I don't like arguing. At dinner parties, my neighbors and I agree with each other, and when we go home we agree with ourselves. Every so often, though, I feel a vague curiosity about the other side of the mirror. Recently when that happened I set out to find some feral hogs.

The South is something you fall back into, like falling backward off a diving board. I was driving around aimlessly in Georgia. After all I'd read about feral hogs, I figured I'd just go down and look out the window and there they'd be. In fact, as is well known, most places visible from a car in this country look exactly the same. Georgia could be Teaneck or anywhere. The only difference is in Georgia you can get boiled peanuts at the 7-Eleven. Today, would anyone write a romantic ballad to a Southern place like "Sweet Home Alabama" or "Georgia on My Mind"? ("Sweet Home Pizza Hut"? "Meinecke Muffler on My Mind"?)

Out behind the superstore, though, or past the edge of pavement, the previous South is still there. Georgia pines still stand, red dirt roads run among them. The unpavable, overly swampy, too hilly parts of the South remain almost as moss-hung and haunted and dark and beautiful as ever. A few minutes' drive from generic suburban Atlanta highway sprawl, the little battlefield of Resaca, Georgia, looks about as it did when my great-great-grandfather's infantry regiment fought there in the Civil War. The Fifty-fifth Ohio Volunteer Infantry was part of a Union force under General Joseph Hooker trying to push the Confederate Army back to Atlanta. The Confederates had entrenched themselves well on a hill near a bend in the Oostanaula River. Colonel Charles Gambee, the Fifty-fifth's commander, turned pale and trembled in the saddle when given the order to storm the entrenchments. In the first assault, he was shot through the heart. Hooker later outflanked the Resaca position, rendering the attack unnecessary. Today, the battlefield is kind of a hole in the corner, its iron fences rusting, its monuments crumbling. Get in your car, and you're back in the traffic stream.

As I drove, I looked for stores that might have hog-hunting books or magazines. Near the South Carolina border I stopped at a little gun shop with only one car out front. In the shop I found the owner, who had just finished test-firing a pistol down a steel pipe set in the floor. He had no copies of *Boar Hunter* magazine, but told me instead a long story about the mounted wild-hog head above the workbench. The story involved a guy, the guy's wife, and the head falling unexpectedly off the wall. The owner then waxed philosophical on the subject of wild hogs. "We gave Europe turkey, and they gave us pigs," he said. "Far as I'm concerned, bacon beats turkey any day. We sure got the best of that deal."

In mega-supermarkets bigger than New Jersey's, the books-and-magazines aisle extended well out of sight. Usually it included a large and fully stocked section for religious literature. In a Gainesville, Georgia, mega-mart I bought a paperback of "The Gnostic Gospels," by Elaine Pagels, a book I'd long been meaning to read. I will go out on a limb and say that not one supermarket in New Jersey has that book for sale. In general I was surprised in the South by how many religious reminders I came across. Every other radio station seemed to be preaching evangelism, and the country-and-Western songs kept mentioning God or angels or Heaven. And the churches, which I'd heard were big, were bigger than I'd imagined, stretching beside the highway for blocks, with palace-like chandeliers in the main entrance, and day-care centers and schools and employment offices and outbuildings housing all-year rummage sales. To drive through the South is to overhear a non-stop Christian conversation rising from the many sayings on church-front signboards. Some messages are friendly, like "We Specialize in Faith Lifts"; some are theological: "Faith Is Not Belief Without Proof, But Trust Without Reservation." Deeper in the pinewoods, signboards at little white clapboard Baptist churches take a more severe tone: "How Will You Spend

Eternity? Smoking or Non-Smoking?" Another, at a Free Will Baptist church on a winding little road, cautioned:

> Stop, Drop, and Roll
> Won't Work in Hell.

I was on my way, meanderingly, to talk to John J. Mayer. I had asked him some questions on the phone, and he said that if I came down we could talk some more and he would try to show me actual feral hogs. John J. Mayer (called Jack) lives in Aiken, South Carolina, where he is a wildlife biologist at the Department of Energy's Savannah River Site. The facility used to make radioactive components for nuclear bombs; it is enclosed in three hundred and ten square miles of woods and swamp. Like many current or former government installations in the South, it has plenty of feral hogs.

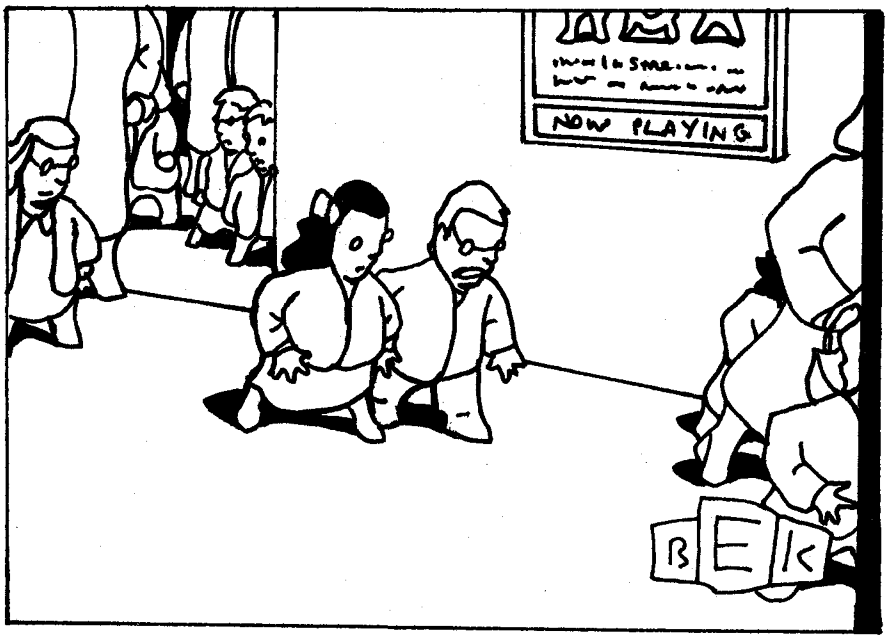
Mayer catches and studies them sometimes. He is a rangy, bespectacled, enthusiastic man of fifty-four who can throw a two-hundred-and-fifty-pound wild hog to the ground unaided. (Among hog hunters, I found, taking on a big hog alone with only the help of dogs is the apogee of hog hunting.) Mayer says he is not the leading wild-hog expert in America, but I think he is. Other scientists specialize in parts of the wild-hog picture, but Mayer follows the entire national and international wild-hog scene. He speaks with a certain relish of a fenced game preserve near Fairbanks, Alaska, that has wild boars, and of the inevitability of those boars' escape: "The coastal brown bears will just *love* that protein resource!" He is up on wild-hog doings in Canada and Finland, where the hogs have been seen far north of their previously assumed range, and in southern Sweden, where they are a pest, and near Kent, in southeast England, where ditto. Wild swine have recently made a comeback in England after being extinct in that country since the sixteen-hundreds. Mayer also gave me the important news that there are now about twenty-three million wild hogs in Australia; according to census figures, Australia has only about twenty million human beings. (Disappointingly, from the point of view of theory, George Bush is not at all popular in Australia. The red state–feral hog corollary evidently does not apply overseas.)

After many wild-hog stories during breakfast at a Shoney's restaurant in Aiken, Mayer and I got in the car and began to scout. As often in the South, country roads were about seven minutes away. On a suburban/farmland road called Tennis Ranch Lane, Mayer suddenly stopped us, and we got out and walked into a field. Hog rooting had left it resembling a choppy sea under irregular winds. Mayer got down on his haunches and sifted the dust. "A lot of time, we'll find rooting like this and have no idea what they were looking for," he said. "Sometimes they'll just keep rooting down until the hole is three or four feet deep. A timber cruiser was walking through the woods near here marking trees a while ago and fell in one of those holes and broke his foot. What food could be down that deep? Tubers? Grubs? Both are pretty unlikely. So we just don't know."

Farther on, the dirt road led past pine plantations, their loblolly and slash pines growing in rows; Mayer told me how wild hogs can rip up many acres of newly planted pine seedlings in a night, eating only the cambium-rich taproot and leaving the rest. The road then descended to swamp, with water oaks draped in Spanish moss, and switch cane, and spreading palmettos, and avenues of ochre muck receding around the buttresses of cypress trees. "This is pig country," he said. We stopped and walked around, but saw only a pig track or two. Beyond the swamp the road crossed a soybean field bordered by a long line of telephone poles. Mayer pointed to the bottoms of the poles, which were covered with mud to a height of about three feet. I said the mud must be splashes from passing cars. Mayer said it was put there by hogs.

We got out for a closer look. The poles were indeed rubbed with mud, not splashed; from the wood splinters hog bristles stuck out, and tusk marks scored the surface like thumbnail scrapes. "All telephone poles are soaked in creosote to preserve them," Mayer explained. "After the poles have been standing awhile, the creosote begins to drain downward and leach out at the base. That's why the bottoms of telephone poles are black. Well, wild hogs just love this creosote. When they're muddy from a wallow, they'll come up to the poles, as they've done here, and rub against them until they've coated themselves with creosote. Any time you see phone poles that are muddy like this, look for wild hogs. The creosote is a good chemical protection against hog lice and other ectoparasites. But how would the hogs know that?" For a moment the look of amused wonder on his face was just like Joe Corn's.

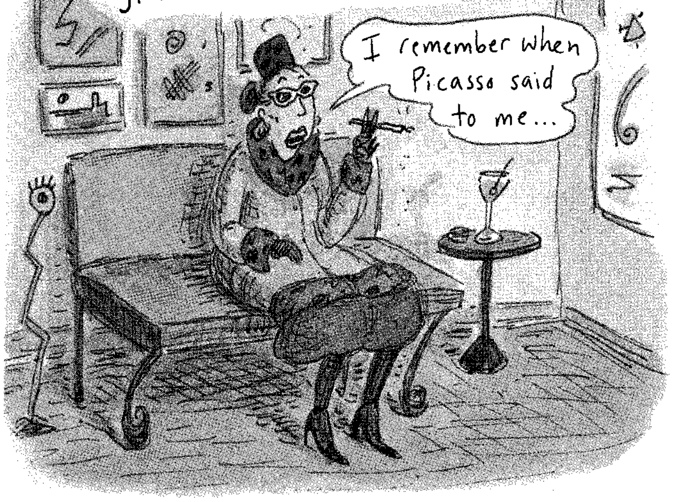
The wild hogs around Aiken proved



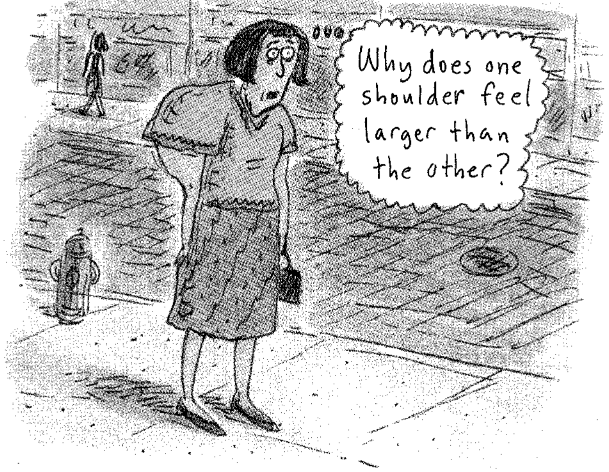
"I could've done without all the wisecracky stuff for adults."

Other People

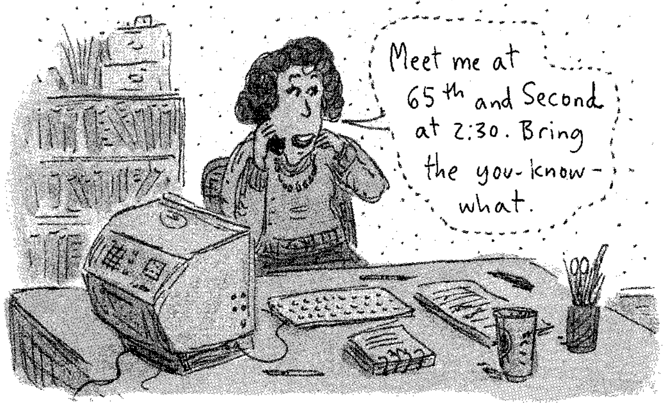
Other people have at least one glamorous relative.


I remember when Picasso said to me...

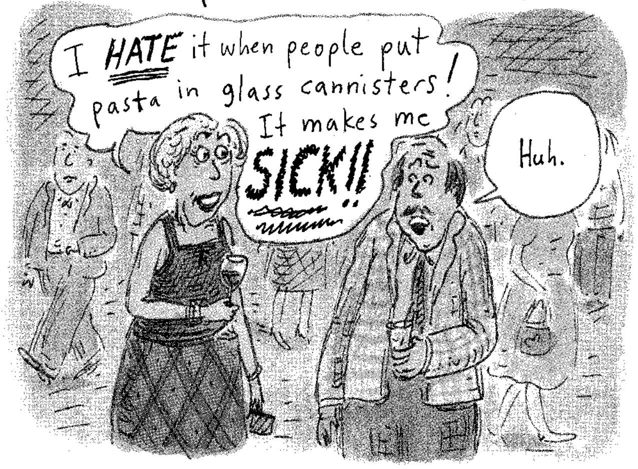
Other people do not have a secret symptom that they worry about.


Why does one shoulder feel larger than the other?

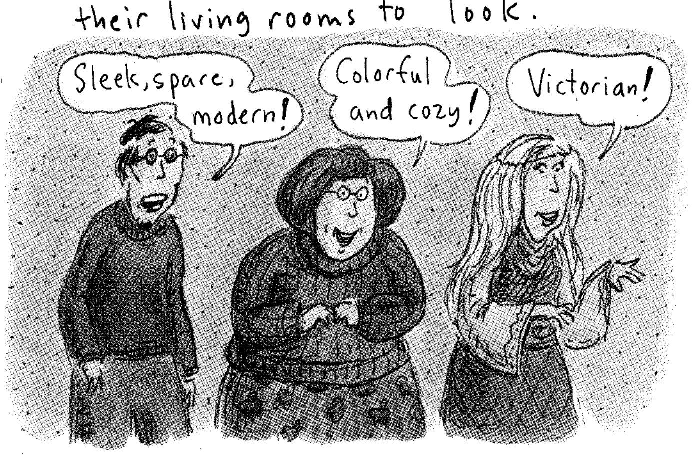
Other people lead complicated, rich, secretive personal lives.


Meet me at 65th and Second at 2:30. Bring the you-know-what.

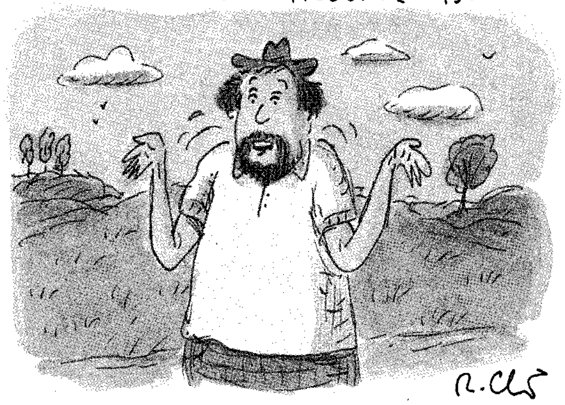
Other people are not enraged by jars of dried pasta used as décor.


I HATE it when people put pasta in glass cannisters! It makes me SICK!!
Huh.

Other people know how they want their living rooms to look.


Sleek, spare, modern!
Colorful and cozy!
Victorian!

Other people know exactly what the Federal Reserve is.



not obliging about being found. I spent a day searching with Jack Mayer, and on another afternoon I walked in a swamp by the Savannah River to no purpose on my own. I saw aspects of the hog, from tracks to wallows to bristles to (on shelves in Mayer's study) tusks and skulls—but, sadly, no hogs themselves.

A few months later, I took another trip to the South to try again. This time, I went with a young wildlife expert named Robbie Edalgo, who has done a lot of trapping for Joe Corn and SCWDS. Robbie and his friends hunt hogs near the south-Georgia town of Cordele, where he grew up. He said we could stay in his house in Cordele with his dad and stepmom. As it happened, the town of Abbeville, twenty-five miles away, would be having its Ocmulgee Wild Hog Festival while we were there. The Ocmulgee Wild Hog Festival features arena contests between specially trained dogs to see which are best at chasing, baying, and catching wild hogs. It is held every year on the day before Mother's Day, giving folks an interesting choice about how to spend the weekend.

Robbie Edalgo was studying for a master's degree in sociology at West Virginia University at Morgantown, so first I drove there from New Jersey and picked him up. Then we drove straight for fifteen hours down to Cordele, and talked all the way. Robbie's last name comes from his great-great-grandfather Francisco Hidalgo, who was an orphan in Mexico when he met a soldier from Georgia named Henry Holliday, who adopted him and brought him back to the U.S. His adoptive father changed the spelling of his last name. Henry Holliday is best known as the father of Dr. John Holliday, the famous Western gunfighter usually called Doc. Francisco was older than John; family lore says that Francisco was the person who taught Doc Holliday to shoot. Francisco later served in the Confederate Army in Georgia under the command of Joe Johnston. That was the same army my great-great-grandfather was fighting against in the battles in and around Atlanta.

The greenery along the road became lusher the farther south we drove. Sometimes thickets of kudzu vine covered everything, like a bulky green tarp. Robbie rolled down the window so we could smell the honeysuckle and magnolia. He said that Georgia smelled better than other places to him, and he loved to breathe it in, especially at evening when he crossed the state line on his way home. Along an exurban stretch of freeway, suddenly traffic slowed, and we saw up ahead a car with its doors open on the side of the road. Its passengers had evidently run into the nearby underbrush, to judge by the expressions of the highway patrolmen standing by the car and peering in the same direction. Also readable on their faces, I believe, was a reluctance to go after fugitives in that kudzu jungle with night coming on.

Arrival at Robbie's dad and stepmom's house, around midnight; sleep; big Southern breakfast; then Robbie and I were in his dad's truck headed for some possibly hog-filled swampland owned by a friend along Alapaha Creek. The morning was halcyon. Mist still hung in the pines, their needles reddish in the early sun. Peanut hulls crunched under the tires as we rolled carefully along a sandy trail at the edge of a plowed-up field. Lines of wild-hog tracks made penman-style flourishes across the field, with intervals of rooting in between. Some of the animals had been piglets. Their tracks were like two almonds side by side. Robbie said wild piglets are watermelon-striped. Many tracks went into the swamp at the line of brush beside the field, and we went in after.

Robbie was carrying a .50-calibre Hawken black-powder musket—unloaded, for the time being. Both he and I had on snake boots, laced up to the knee and thickly padded, because of the water moccasins and cottonmouths that inhabit the swamp. Notebook and pen were my only other accessories. We started out stepping from grass hummock to grass hummock across expanses of gray-pudding mud, which when I sank into it was a richer black farther down. Braided cross-vines ascended into the swamp's upper story like scenery cables into the flies. The trees were a mixture of cypress, swamp tupelo, tulip poplar, various oaks, and chinaberry. Beneath the chinaberries their little purple blossoms lay on the gray mud like a pattern on an old dress, sometimes with hog tracks squished in between.

In the brushier places, wisteria vines in full flower were dragging little trees to the ground, while blackberry and wild rose and unnamed vines entangled so thickly as to make a wall. Sometimes this obstacle could be breached by crawling beneath on our bellies; at others the best move was a kind of Rockette high kick to get above the vines and bushes and stamp them down. Unlike Robbie, I am not thirty, as the experience reminded me. At one point, tripping on cypress knees the shape of little fire hydrants, plunging into vines, compacting cubic yards of berry bushes to crush through them, we actually could not go forward anymore. We sagged into the brush as if it were an uncomfortable hammock, then turned and plunged back the way we'd come.

When the sun was high overhead, and the swamp had become hot and buggy, we gave up. For just a second we saw something moving a long way off through the trees. But when at last we scratchily emerged onto the peanut field, we had the result that was becoming customary: no hog. I cursed, but Robbie Edalgo did not. I never once heard him use a curse word. I spent many hours with him, and I don't believe he'd curse regardless of the provocation.

At evening we went out again. Now we were on unfenced private land owned by a hunting club along a bigger creek called Turkey Creek. The land is managed for wild turkey and white-tailed deer. Robbie's friend Phillip, who runs the place, told us to shoot all the hogs we saw. Phillip is trying, unsuccessfully, to get rid of them; he traps and shoots them by the dozen and gives them to local people to eat, but the hogs keep coming. Though the hogs are his enemies, when he talked about them he could not suppress a half smile that sometimes became a laugh: "We had this one hog in a trap, and he kept charging the side of it again and again until he'd bent it out about this far, and the hog busted up his nose doin' it, he's all bloody and beat up and enraged, and we put some shelled corn in there for him to eat, and right away he goes to eatin' without a care in the world. Wild hog's the only animal that'll always eat, no matter how freaked out he is."

Robbie loaded his Hawken musket with eighty-five grains of black powder, poured yellow oil on a squat, snug-fitting bullet, and tamped it down the barrel with the ramrod. We left his dad's truck at the forest edge uphill from the creek and ducked into the gloom. Here trails had been cut conveniently through the undergrowth. We went along them quietly, twitching from mosquito attacks all the while. Anytime we stopped to listen, the mosquitoes really found our range, causing both of us a near-constant swatting, hopping, and flicking. I was wearing a netted hat like a beekeeper's and Robbie had wrapped a piece of camo bug netting around his head, babushka style. For all its insect life, the place also seemed extremely hoggy, with tracks and rooting and occasional distant branch-cracking sounds. The sun went down.

We were walking along a grassy track with a young pinewoods on our right and a parklike setting of tall trees and open ground on our left. Beyond lay wheat fields, which we thought the hogs might return to for a night's rooting. About two hundred paces ahead, two deer came out of the pines and crossed the trail. They turned and began walking directly at us. Robbie whispered that we should just hold still and see what they did. As they approached, excessively slowly, shrieking mosquitoes swarmed on me. I resisted the urge, but finally I had to swat.

The deer's ears flew up, and they spooked back into the pines. We continued on. After we'd gone about a hundred steps beyond the spot where the deer had emerged, Robbie turned back to look again. Immediately, he went to one knee and gestured to me to get down. I crouched, and saw what he'd seen. A hog, in dark silhouette, came out of the pines exactly where the deer had been. The spring green of the long grass behind him made his swamp-mud-black color stand out. Robbie brought the gun to his shoulder. A second ahead of him, the hog reversed ends balletically, his feet seeming not to touch the ground, and disappeared back into the pines.

We crept to the spot where we'd seen him. Robbie said that there had been another pig behind him, and that they had been extra wary because they had heard the deer we'd spooked. We looked, we waited. Robbie went back into the thick cover. No sign of any hogs.

I was ecstatic to have seen my first wild hog not dead or in a trap or along a highway but in its home territory. Robbie then led us to a brushy place of ambuscade beside a field, where we sat until full dark while a swampful of mosquitoes gathered around. There we didn't see a thing. Robbie had wanted to bring a hog home to his family for a barbecue—wild hog is delicious, and his dad is a prize-winning barbecuer—so he was disappointed. I felt relieved that my search had succeeded without including the death of a hog.

BAD CREDIT O.K.
GREGORY

To understand the Ocmulgee Wild Hog Festival, you have to understand the dog guys. Before I went to the festival, I had never met any dog guys, though I had heard them referred to. When I asked wildlife-management people or scientists questions they didn't know the answer to, often they replied, "You need to ask the dog guys," their tone suggesting that the dog guys' universe was a different one, in which ordinary science did not necessarily rule. Jack Mayer told me stories of drag-out, hand-to-hoof battles between dog guys and wild hogs in which dogs got flipped in the air and came down tusk-stabbed and bleeding, while the dog guy almost bled to death from tusk wounds to the artery in his thigh. By reputation, the dog guys sounded mythic, Paul Bunyanesque, and themselves probably part dog, or hog.

Dog guys chase and capture hogs using packs made up of three categories of dog. The first, trail dogs, have good noses to find and follow the hog. The second, bay dogs, cause the hog to "bay up"—to take a defensive position, often at the base of a cliff or a tree—and then they hold him there by barking and making quick countermoves when the hog tries to dodge away. The loud baying of these dogs also helps the hunters, who are running along behind, to locate the fight. The third, catch dogs, attack the hog while he's bayed up, bite him on the nose or ear, and hang on. While the hog is thus preoccupied, the hunters (several, usually) arrive, go behind the hog, grab his hind legs, and throw him on his side. Wild hogs are flat-sided animals and, once tipped over, with a hunter atop them, cannot easily escape. The hunters then tie the hog's legs, or shoot it, or stick it with a knife.

Hunting hogs with dogs has disadvantages. Some people think it is horrible, and raise a complaint if they hear of it occurring on public lands. This limits

"I brought lunch from home today. Would you toss it for me?"

the ability of state and federal wildlife officials to control hog numbers with dogs. Another problem is that running dogs through the countryside disturbs animals other than hogs: not all of the dogs can be counted on to chase hogs only. And, aside from the consequences for the hog, the battle between wild pig and dog can result in dead or badly injured dogs. Dog guys get to be self-taught field veterinarians, patching their wounded on-site with surgical stapling guns, suture kits, and blood-stop powder. Usually they take the extra precaution of dressing their most valuable dogs in puncture-proof vests of ballistic-strength fibre and in stout "cut collars" that come up almost to the ears.

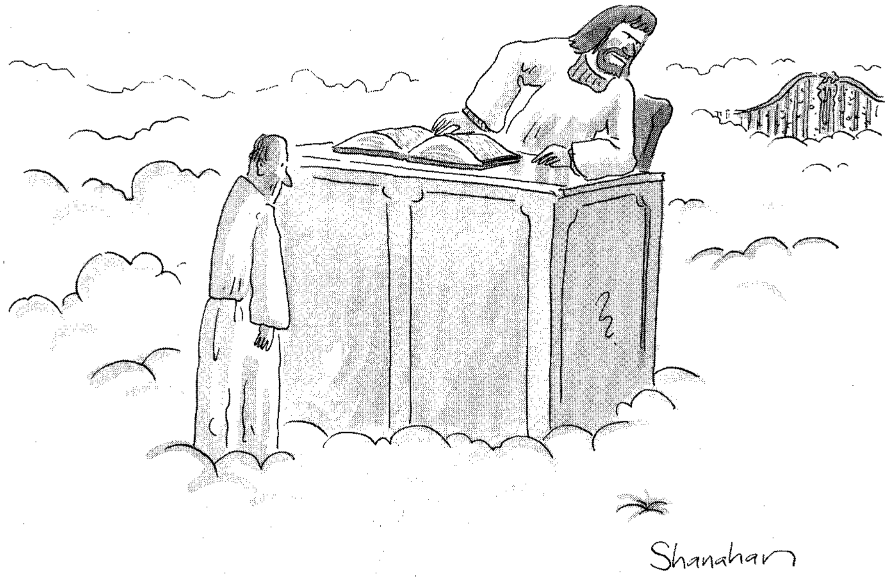
Despite all this, hunting with dogs is by far the best way to catch wild hogs. It works better than shooting or trapping, and may be resorted to when those methods fail. What the experts mean by their tone—"You need to ask the dog guys"—is that, in the end, nobody gets down to the hogs' reality better than the dog guys.

If I ever had any doubts about the fairness of the red state–feral hog corollary, I lost them when I saw the dog guys. As evidence of the connection between politics and feral hogs, they could be Exhibit A. The characteristic insignia of their sport is the Confederate flag. It's on their hats, their belt buckles, their bandannas, their insulated drink holders. Evidently, their views have not been represented adequately by any party since the Civil War. A favorite T-shirt they wear shows a pit bull's snarling head, with saliva strands connecting the top and bottom fangs, superimposed on a Confederate flag. On top, the shirt says "Dixie Traditions" and, below, "Since 1861." Some T-shirts feature the Confederate flag with the words "If This Shirt Offends You, It Makes My Day," or "If This Shirt Offends You, You Need a History Lesson." The puncture-proof vests worn by many of their dogs display the Confederate flag on the dog's chest. There are probably dog guys who disagree with these sentiments; I note only the general impression the insignias leave.

As for the history lesson, the town of Abbeville, site of the wild-hog festival, offers several right nearby. On the lawn by the elegant sandstone courthouse, at the town's main intersection, a historical marker indicates that Hernando de Soto discovered the Ocmulgee River near this spot in April of 1540; it does not add that he was the man who introduced hogs to the continent. Another marker commemorates the capture of the fleeing Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy, by Union troops twenty-six miles southwest of Abbeville on May 10, 1865, "his hopes for a new nation, in which each state would exercise without interference its cherished 'Constitutional rights,' forever dead." Prisoners (all black, when I walked by) at the county jail just up the street stand talking through the fence to their visitors (all black). The prisoners wear jail clothes striped black-and-white, as in old movies.

The festival was at the fairgrounds, west of town. It had booths and kiddie rides and prize drawings, like any town fair. At the fairground's edge, where the woods began, the hog-baying arena had been set up among the trees. The shaded surroundings gave the place an air of semi-secrecy. Chain-link fence about six feet high and reinforced at the bottom with coarse-woven black nylon fabric enclosed a circular area about eighty steps across. Within it, oaks and loblolly pines grew well apart from one another on ground that was bare dirt, pine needles, and leaves. Loudspeakers had been taped to the trees with silver duct tape. Outside the fence stood an irregular encirclement of bleachers, about seven rows high. The arrangement might have been a theatre-in-the-round for a highly realistic production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream." One side of the arena opened to an entry chute blocked with a piece of plywood. Behind it were the pens holding about thirty recently trapped wild hogs.

I went over and looked at them. They were all exactly the color of swamp mud, their bristles clumped in points like the hair of a person who hasn't showered for a while. Soupy gray mud had been provided for some of them to wallow in. The hogs in the wallow were all crowded into the farthest corner of it, as remote as they could get from the door they would eventually have to run through. One or two hogs lifted their snouts to the wind, rhinarial disks dipping and twitching prehensilely on the incoming scents from the fair. In an adjoining pen, the hogs had only a metal floor to lie on, and waited peacefully in



"Damn! God gave me that pen."

a big heap of hogs, maybe four deep. There is nothing like the expression in a wild hog's eyes. I studied it for a while and the words I found were: unromantic; undeceived. The hog at the very bottom of the pile had his face a bit flattened out by the weight of the hogs above him. His mouth was a long straight line parallel to the floor. His eyes, not discontentedly, followed the passersby.

The dog guys, in their parking area behind the arena, sat on folding chairs beside their pickups. Many had dogs for sale. In the truck beds, kennel boxes with wire-mesh doors were stacked three and four high. One man had a cardboard box of pit-bull puppies, fifty dollars each, straining upward with wrinkly, reptilian smiles. Bumper stickers advertised, "I catch more hogs with Kemmer curs," or "I catch more hogs with Catahoula curs," or similar slogans. The word "cur" is a higher-sounding synonym for "mutt." Any dog can be used to hunt hogs, but mutts are said to do better than purebreds. Leashed and panting at their owners' sides, the dogs seemed happy, but the dog guys themselves were oddly quiet, especially compared with the defiant inscriptions many of them wore. Later, a festival organizer told me that, on a hog hunt the night before, a widely known hunter up by Macon, Georgia, had gone into the Ocmulgee River to rescue one of his dogs and had disappeared in the water. Police divers were searching for his body now.

At the judging stand, Robbie introduced me to Bob Addison, the "godfather of hog hunting" (Robbie said) and the founder of the festival. Bob Addison owns a wild-hog-hunting camp in Abbeville. He is slope-shouldered, long-armed, powerful-looking, and more than six feet tall; he wore faded camo gear and a brown baseball cap with his hunting lodge's name. In his late fifties, he appears stronger for being that age, and his droopy, pale eyes are somehow made more intimidating, not less, by the thin-framed spectacles he wears. He told me the rules and procedures of the hog-baying contest and the details of the judging.

He said that good performance dogs like the ones here today are usually not the same as good hog-hunting dogs, who tend to be shy around crowds but much fiercer in the woods. We started talking about hunting. I asked him if he had ever had any dog killed while hunting hogs. He winced, as if I had stepped on his toe. "Yes, I have," he said. "I have had two dogs killed."

Then he said, "C'mon, let's go—I'll show you." He told a contest official he'd be back soon, led us to his immense red pickup, drove out the lane from the parking lot, turned east on the highway, crossed the Ocmulgee River, took another main road, maneuvered down a narrow gravel road, stopped in front of his hunting lodge, and led us inside. The walls of the lodge were covered with mounted heads of hogs and deer; hog skulls lined the mantelpiece. He took down a skull that had been sawed off just behind the snout. Its tusks were chisel-pointed, several inches long.

"This hog here killed both my dogs," he said, turning the skull back and forth in his hand. "This was a big old boar, lived up around Bonaire, Georgia, forty-five, fifty mile from here. In his life this hog killed fifteen dogs, including my two. He was about the biggest thing around there and didn't fear nothing. He charged a man's truck one time and flattened one of its tires. People called this hog Bear. Well, I went up on an afternoon to see some land I own in the area. It's three hundred acres, and sometimes I have field exercises there with my dogs. I let the dogs out of the truck and right away they th'owed up their heads and started baying. Then they went off running through the brush. I could tell by the sound they'd found a terrible big hog. I was by myself. I run in after 'em and caught up with 'em. They had this huge boar partially bayed and partially caught. I got around behind and took a hind foot and a front foot, and I picked him up to th'ow him—and the hog stood up with me! Never before or since have I found a hog I couldn't take by myself, but this one I couldn't. I stood there holding him, and he stood there on his hind legs with me, for maybe fifteen or twenty seconds, but it seemed a whole, whole lot longer, and I could see the dogs in front of him still barking, and finally I had to let him go, and as quick as that he went and—"

Bob Addison stopped, his eyes bleak and his lips tight. After a while, he continued.

"And he cut my bulldog's throat. Then he turned around and killed one of my bay dogs. I couldn't see no tree to get up, so I backed off. He looked at me and I looked at him, and I said, 'Bear, we'll be back.' And I swear the way he looked at me, he was saying, 'I'll be back, too.'

"I went to the closest pay phone and called Wayne, my trooper buddy, and I said, 'Bring ever' dog you have, come right now.' I also called David, who's big enough to hold three mules. We went back in after that hog, and the dogs struck his trail, and had him bayed minutes later, and we showed up and caught him and th'owed him down, and I put the handcuffs on him—"

("Handcuffs?"

Bob Addison: "Sure, a lot of hog hunters use handcuffs. They're the best and fastest way to immobilize a hog."

"You mean like those plastic handcuffs they use on protesters?"

"Shoot, no! You need steel cuffs to hold a hog! I'm a retired state trooper. I use the same kind of cuffs I used on the job.")

"—and, once we had him cuffed, we lifted him into the back of the truck. And by the time we got home that hog was dead. Most likely he went into shock and died. That's what happens sometimes to old boars that have never been captured before. In his very last fight, he cut up (but didn't kill) three bulldogs. He was a most terrible hog."

At the arena, the bleachers were filling up. People toted drinks, paper plates of food, babies. Robbie brought me some excellent barbecue his dad had made. I ate it fast, then used the paper it came in to wipe the sauce off my face. I asked Robbie if I'd got it all, and he answered, "Uh, pretty much." Small groups of black people had found good vantage points from which to watch; some were right above the entry chute. They talked among themselves at volumes impossible to overhear. Almost everybody else was white. Some boys sported a souvenir I had never seen before—a green inflatable space alien with long, bendable arms and legs that could be wrapped around a person as if the alien were holding on.

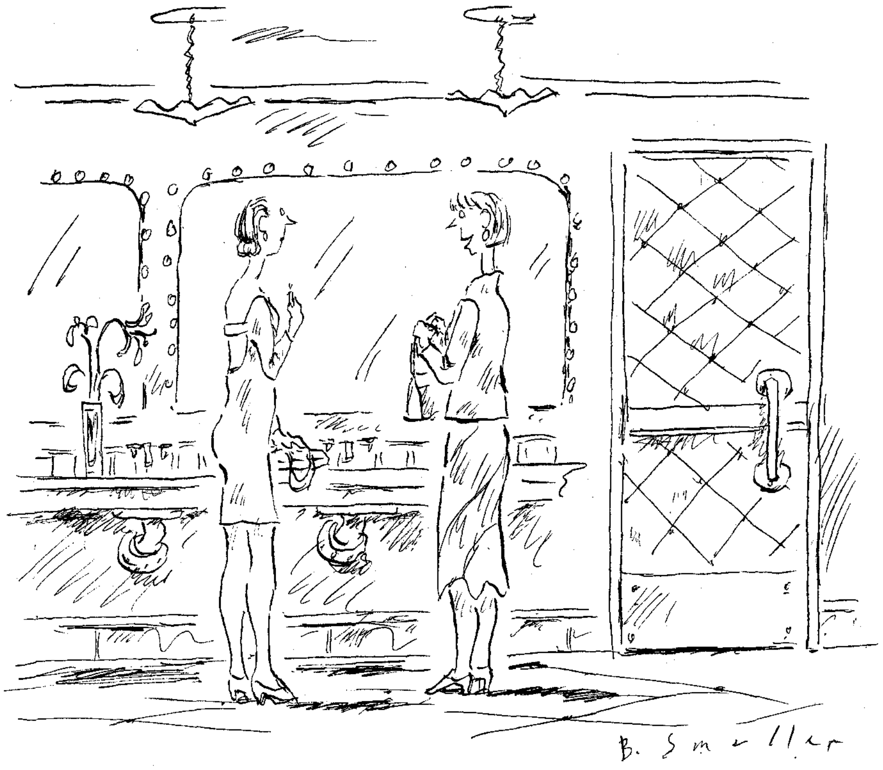
In just a minute, the two-dog baying competition would begin. In pairs, bay dogs would chase a hog, run him down, get on either side of him, herd and worry him, and try to hold him in one spot. The pair that held the hog best for the space of two minutes, in the judges' opinion, would win a tall trophy and a couple of thousand dollars. The hogs would run, snort, squeal, clack their teeth threateningly, charge the dogs, kick up dust, cause the handlers to dodge around trees. The hogs sometimes would be bitten, torn, grabbed, thrown, sat on, and finally shoved back into their pen. Many in the crowd would watch with an almost out-of-body concentration.

A man carrying his daughter on his shoulders came and stood near us. The girl was four or five years old. She had a blocky head, medium-length brown curls, and intent dark eyes. She wore flower-print sneakers, and her dad held her by them. She did not give promise of growing up to be beautiful. I imagined her in adulthood as one of those strong-character Southern women who speak their minds and make people uncomfortable—a fearless old aunt, maybe, or a no-nonsense columnist. Before her dad brought her today (I'm guessing), he had told her she would be seeing dogs and pigs. She had pictured (I'm guessing) dogs like their dog at home and pigs like the ones in the storybooks.

The first pair of bay dogs entered the arena at the far side of it, a quarter-circle around the fence from the hogs' gate. The dogs' holders bent down and took the clips at the ends of the leashes.

Skinny boys climbing on the hog pen banged it to get a hog to move into the chute. Somebody lifted the plywood door. A boy leaned forward and jabbed the hog through the fence bars. The hog came out into the arena and began to trot along the fence's perimeter. The dogs, suddenly released, went streaking toward him. In their many straps and bucklings, they looked like a SWAT team, striving faces pointed eagerly at the hog. From her high view the little girl looked at the dogs, at the hog. Her mind took a second to understand what was going on. Then, in a tone of the greatest emergency, with an authority that cut through every noise and rang above the assembly, the little girl cried, "Run, pig! *Run!*"

Some people laughed, the way a crowd usually does when a child makes a remark that everybody hears. Some people said, "Aww . . . ," in sympathy. The little girl, seeing that the pig had nowhere to run to, began to cry, and her father lifted her down and comforted her. She cried louder when the pig squealed. A woman standing nearby excitedly took up the girl's cause, saying, "She's right! What are they doing!" and so on, until her neighbors shushed her. For a moment we all hesitated, uneasy and off balance; then we returned to the business at hand. ♦



"I love your body—where did you get it?"

ANNALS OF MEDICINE

THE GENE HUNTERS

Closing in on the origins of Alzheimer's disease.

BY SUE HALPERN

One morning last May in the Dominican Republic, two white S.U.V.s left the parking garage at the Gran Almirante Hotel and Casino, in Santiago, just as the gamblers and prostitutes were calling it a night, and headed half an hour north, to the town of Navarette. The lead vehicle was driven by Angel Piriz, a thirty-seven-year-old Cuban doctor who lives in New York. Beside him was Rosarina Estevez, a recent graduate of medical school in Santiago. Both were working as research physicians at Columbia University under the supervision of Richard Mayeux. For nearly twenty years, Mayeux, a neurologist, epidemiologist, and co-director of the Taub Institute for Research on Alzheimer's Disease and the Aging Brain, has been compiling the world's most comprehensive genetic library of families with Alzheimer's, in an effort to uncover the biological origins of a disease that affects 4.5 million Americans. The family members are predominantly residents of the heavily Dominican neighborhood of Washington Heights, where the Taub Institute is based, or, like the family that the Columbia researchers were hoping to see, from the Dominican Republic itself.

Navarette isn't much of a town—a strip of concrete shops on either side of the road, and street venders selling pineapples and mangoes and fresh goat meat—and the family didn't have much of an address. "It's called Ginger Alley," Vincent Santana, the driver of the second vehicle, said, turning sharply into a narrow dirt track patrolled by chickens. Santana, who is in charge of the researchers' field work, gathered the notebooks

In Alzheimer's, research suggests, a protein fragment known as beta-amyloid attacks the brain's synapses. When a neuron's axon (displ and questionnaires they would need to administer the neuropsychological tests that, along with a medical exam, would determine who would be given a diagnosis of Alzheimer's disease.

Alzheimer's can be divided into two categories. One is known as early-onset Alzheimer's, which is rare, and tends to strike between the ages of thirty and sixty. Almost half of early-onset Alzheimer's is straightforwardly genetic, and follows the simple laws of Mendelian inheritance: if you are born with the mutated gene, you get the disease. Much more common is the late-onset disease, which tends to afflict people who are sixty-five and older. Because the prevalence of late-onset Alzheimer's increases as the population ages, the number of cases is expected to double in the next twenty-five years. Late-onset Alzheimer's is thought to be genetically influenced, too, but in a much less predictable way: it appears to involve perhaps half a dozen genes that, individually or in combination, increase one's risk of dementia. Researchers all over the world have spent the past decade hunting for these risk-factor genes, spurred by the impending public-health crisis and the daunting insufficiency of available treatments. They believe that working out the genetics of late-onset Alzheimer's, and thus finding molecular pathways that influence the course of the disease, was the best—and possibly the only—hope for finding a cure. So far, only one of those risk-factor genes has been conclusively identified. In May, though, as the Columbia researchers travelled through the Dominican Republic, drawing blood that was sent by FedEx each day to New York, it looked as if Mayeux's library might soon yield a second.

"This is a branch of the original family we saw here last year," explained Santana, a soft-spoken Dominican-American whose face was often knotted with worry. (Were the directions good? Would the subjects be home? Would they still be willing to volunteer? Would the data be useful? Would the blood spoil? And what about the Red Sox?) He directed Estevez to interview an elderly couple who lived across the way, then headed down the alley with Piriz, past houses made of concrete and tin, cutting through someone's kitchen and into a narrower alley and a warren of houses, asking for a man named Vargas. The proband—the first person in the family that Mayeux's team saw—died in February, at age ninety. "She's confirmed with the disease," Santana said. "In her generation, a couple of cousins and siblings have A.D. There's some first-cousin intermarriage. These people we're seeing today are her cousins. If we can find them."

As the researchers walked through the neighborhood, they attracted a parade of young boys, who eventually led

een in the photograph above) and dendrites encounter deposits of the beta-amyloid (displayed as red), they break apart and wither.

them to Vargas's house, a spare, three-room dwelling. Vargas, a gaunt eighty-three-year-old who was tanned from a life growing bananas and tending rice fields, was lying, bare-chested and wearing blue shorts, on a bed with yellow smiley-face sheets. Surrounded by two of his five wives, four of his fourteen children, and an assortment of other relatives, he wasn't saying much. A few months earlier, he had been told he had pancreatic cancer and he wasn't expected to live out the year. Even so, he had consented to Santana's request to participate in the study.

Santana had known about Vargas for almost a year. In his notes from an interview with the proband in the spring of 2004, there was a reminder to identify and track down all her cousins and their siblings, in order to determine how they were related. Constructing accurate genealogies, which is what Santana does, is fundamental to figuring out how a disease travels among kin, which is what Richard Mayeux does.

"What day of the week is it?" Santana asked Vargas. A series of questions followed: "What is the date?" "What year?" "Where are we?" This was the warmup, and Vargas was doing O.K. He knew that he was in the bedroom, not the kitchen; he knew the year; he knew the season.

Santana leaned in close. "I'm going to read you a list of twelve words, and when I'm done I want you to repeat them back to me. *Huevo*," he began. "*Lava*." Vargas fingered a religious medal he wore around his neck and looked lost. "I can't remember," he said, pointing to his head. The verbal test is one part of a forty-five-minute battery of exams that was developed for the Dominican Republic study by Yaakov Stern, a neuropsychologist who has worked with Mayeux for more than twenty years. If someone, given the opportunity to repeat any of the twelve words six times, for a top score of seventy-two, can't get to twenty-five, he might be considered for "case status." When the test was over, Vargas's score was well below that.

In the next room, Piriz was going through the same routine with one of Vargas's wives, a short seventy-year-old woman in a faded housedress and flip-flops, who was eying him warily. "Do you ever find yourself getting lost?" Piriz asked. "Hell no," she said. He took her blood pressure, looked into her eyes, tested her reflexes. Then he put on green latex gloves, took out a syringe, and prepared to draw her blood.

"I started off thinking Alzheimer's was not a genetic disease," Mayeux told me the first time I visited him, last November, in his unusually tidy office, on the nineteenth floor of the Presbyterian Hospital Building, on West 168th Street. "I thought it was environmental, associated with aging. But the accumulating data convinced me. It doesn't always follow a pattern, but it does also track in families, so that if you have family members with the disease you have a much higher risk of getting it, and siblings with the disease give you an even higher risk. The evidence was very hard to counter."

Mayeux selected one of a series of thick bound volumes that took up most of a wall, and began flipping through the pages as he spoke. It was an encyclopedia of family trees, which showed who in his study was related to whom, which ones had the disease, which ones were disease-free, and which ones were living in the border town between lucidity and dementia.

"What we wanted to do was find a population where we thought the rates were higher, because the thing about genetics is that if you try to identify people who carry the gene you are looking for unusual people," Mayeux said. "It's not like epidemiology, where you try to get random samples of random people. Genetics is just the opposite. You want a biased population. You want families where there is more of the disease, because you have a better chance of figuring out what the gene is.

"That's how we stumbled into this study of people in the Dominican Republic," he went on. "We noticed, when we were doing a general population study of elderly people who live around the hospital, that Dominicans had about three times the rate of Alzheimer's disease compared to the whites in the community. So you have to ask yourself why that would be. Then it starts to explain itself—that, at least in the Dominican Republic, Dominicans tend to marry other Dominicans, and you don't have different populations moving in there. You have a smaller genetic pool, and the gene pool tends to stay enriched." Mayeux pointed to a page in the book. "Here's one. These two people are twins. Look at how many people who are related to them are affected and how many are beginning to experience symptoms."

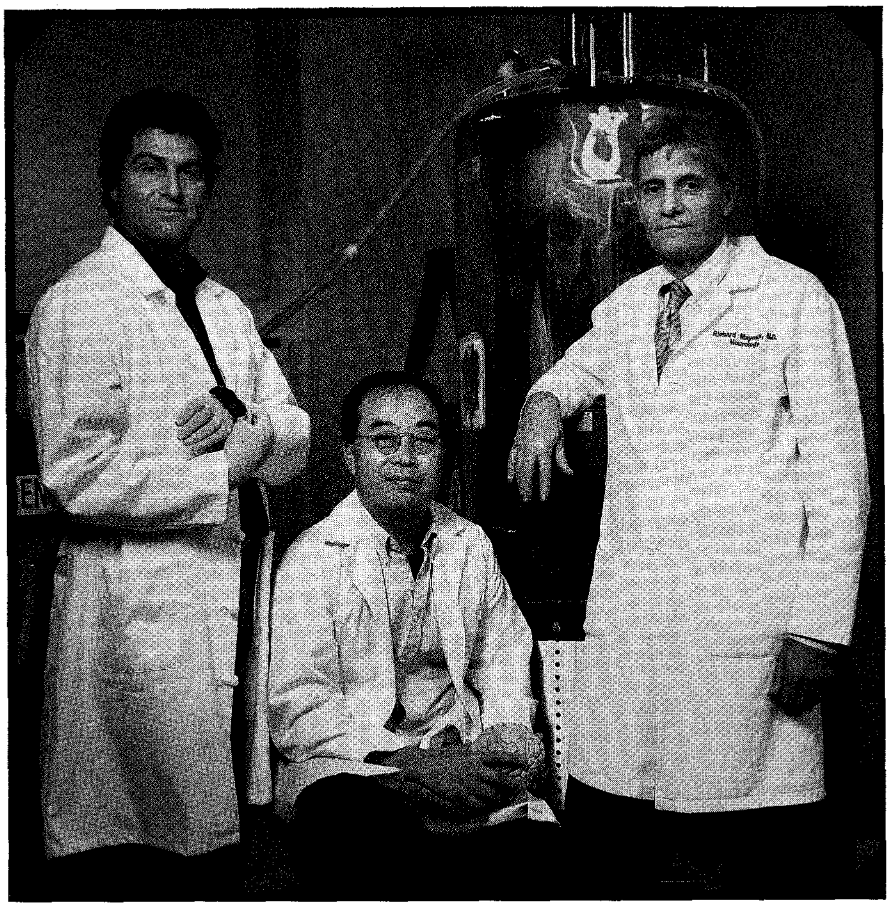
Mayeux, who was born in Louisiana, has a nasal drawl and a deceptive air of someone with time on his hands. He is fifty-nine, tall and fit, with a full head of brown hair going slowly gray and a mostly unlined brow. His colleagues joke that he is a graduate of the Dick Clark School of Aging. He is constantly in motion, typically late, and driven: in addition to his role at Taub, he is the director of Columbia University's Sergievsky Center, which conducts epidemiological research on neurological diseases; a professor of neurology, psychiatry, and epidemiology; a practicing physician at Columbia's Memory Disorder Center; and the coördinator of a nationwide effort to collect, store, and make available to researchers genetic material from families with late-onset Alzheimer's disease. (The project was initiated in 2002 by the National Institute of Aging, which also funds the bulk of Mayeux's research.) Still, he is so ready to credit colleagues and collaborators that his own ambition can sometimes seem evanescent.

Since getting his medical degree, at the University of Oklahoma, in 1972, Mayeux has studied diseases of the central nervous system: epilepsy, Parkinson's, Huntington's, Alzheimer's. He is also an adroit administrator, overseeing a staff of a hundred and eighty-five neurologists, geneticists, psychologists, epidemiologists, data-entry clerks, cell biologists, biochemists, genetic counsellors, and animal modellers spread over five floors of the hospital building, as well as a clinic at Columbia's Neurological Institute.

Here they were pursuing the medical version of "big science," drawing on a dozen separate disciplines, each with a distinct vocabulary, methodology, and way of seeing, in an effort to understand diseases that are widely feared because they seem inexplicable and random and so common as to be nearly inevitable. With Alzheimer's, everyone has a stake in the outcome, and for those who have had a parent or close relative succumb to dementia there's particular urgency to the question: "Are we next?" My visits to the Taub Institute over the past year opened a window on the collaborative—and competitive—nature of much scientific innovation. Forget about the image of the solitary genius hunched at a lab bench; forget about the eureka moment when everything is explained. The members of Mayeux's team had no illusions about what real progress would require. They were looking for mutated genes, for corrupted molecular pathways, for predictors of disease, for effective therapies. The search was painstaking, fraught, and more prone to failure than to success; it was also exhilarating.

Many of the team members—like the geneticist Joe Lee, who sifts through the thirty thousand genes that make up the human genome, seeking a genetic quirk that could account for the neuropathology associated with Alzheimer's disease, and the neurologist Scott Small, who has developed a new way of using magnetic-resonance imaging to look deep into the brain—took the conventional academic route of medical degrees and doctorates. But a surprising number never intended to chase what Mayeux calls "the great white whale of neuroscience." There is on staff a former Wall Street accountant who analyzes M.R.I. data and a German particle physicist who develops diagnostic-imaging techniques. Angel Piriz, the Cuban doctor, had spent three years working for a Manhattan construction company, and he found the Columbia job on the Internet. Vincent Santana was a nineteen-year-old security guard in the Presbyterian Hospital emergency room when he was offered extra hours to escort Mayeux's field researchers on their interviews in Washington Heights, his own neighborhood. Eventually, Santana became one of the researchers, expert in administering and scoring complex neuropsychological tests, and then the research coördinator, and now, at thirty-five, a co-author of four of Mayeux's scientific papers.

Not far from the Taub Institute, in the basement of the New York Brain Bank, there is a room with industrial freezers containing thirty thousand samples of plasma. In 1988, when Mayeux inaugurated what is known as the WHICAP study, a sweeping investigation of the health and habits of twenty-five hundred elderly residents of Washington Heights, he instructed the researchers to collect blood in addition to recording demographic and medical data. The field of Alzheimer's genetics was in its infancy, and putting blood on ice to look for genes was either capricious or prescient. It had been only four years since scientists at the University of California, San Diego, succeeded in sequencing amyloid, the key constituent of the plaques that accumulate in an Alzheimer's brain, and about two years since it was established that amyloid was a peptide—a protein fragment that came in different lengths. The researchers called the toxic peptide beta-amyloid, and proposed that a genetic mutation causing its overproduction would be found somewhere along chromosome 21, an extra copy of which produces Down syndrome. The amyloid they had sequenced was identical to the amyloid found in the brains of Down patients, and, by middle age, most people with Down syndrome have developed Alzheimer's-like symptoms, so it seemed logical that chromosome 21 would be implicated.


Scott Small, Joe Lee, and Richard Mayeux. Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

And that chromosome is where, in 1991, geneticists at the University of London found the first Alzheimer's gene. It was called APP, an acronym for amyloid precursor protein, and was associated, in mutated forms, with early-onset Alzheimer's. The mutations caused the overproduction of beta-amyloid in the brain; without exception, people who carried the mutations developed Alzheimer's disease. The gene gave scientists a way to begin to understand what was happening in an Alzheimer's brain, and a rudimentary hypothesis: Alzheimer's disease was caused by clumps of beta-amyloid that strangled neurons and synapses.

"When it was first discovered, we thought that it was *the* Alzheimer's gene," Mayeux recalled. But the math didn't work: there were millions of cases of Alzheimer's disease, and the APP mutations were estimated to occur in fewer than two hundred of them.

The search for additional genes gained momentum during the nineteen-nineties, and within a few years three more had been found and confirmed.

PREVIOUS SPREAD: COURTESY GAN WEN-BIAO. THIS PAGE: CORBIS

Two, called presenilins, were discovered by the University of Toronto neurologist and geneticist Peter St George-Hyslop, and were also associated with early-onset Alzheimer's. They caused beta-amyloid to accumulate in the brain by affecting the way enzymes break up the amyloid precursor protein into amyloid fragments—which gave further credence to the idea that too much beta-amyloid precipitated dementia. Still, the presenilin genes couldn't account for the usual form of the disease, either; they were carried by only a few hundred families worldwide.

The fourth Alzheimer's gene, ApoE4, was different. It wasn't Mendelian and deterministic, it was associated with late-onset Alzheimer's, and it wasn't rare; it is found in a quarter of the population, and is a variant of a gene we all carry. Many who have the ApoE4 gene never get Alzheimer's disease, and many people who do get Alzheimer's don't carry it; twelve years after its discovery, no one can say why that is.

In the lectures that Mayeux gives to people who may be unfamiliar with the simplest facts of genetics—that genes, which code for proteins, are made up of sequences of chemicals called bases, and, if one base is out of sequence, the protein may be dysfunctional—he often ends up talking about cops and robbers.

"Our colleagues at the genome center in the United States tell us that there may be three billion base pairs in the entire genome and that there are something like one hundred and twenty million base pairs in each of the chromosomes, and about two thousand to two hundred thousand base pairs in a gene, and what we are doing is looking for a single base pair that is different or out of sequence," he told a group of Dominican professors and students at the Universidad Tecnológica de Santiago, after his field researchers completed nine more interviews the previous day in Puerto Plata and four more that morning in Jicome.

"So we're looking for that one base pair, which is like having the police know that someone has committed a crime somewhere, but they don't know where, and they have to start looking for him all over the universe," Mayeux went on. "That's basically where we are. The goal of genetic family studies is to try to get down to the earth, and then into the neighborhood, and eventually to find the culprit."

"I'm only going to the party because the suicide attempt failed."

If mutations are the robbers, and scientists are the cops, then since the discovery of ApoE4 the cops had made something like a hundred false arrests. In one peer-reviewed paper after another, research teams all over the world claimed to have identified about a hundred unique genes that in some way triggered late-onset Alzheimer's disease. Yet none of those findings had been replicated consistently by other researchers, if at all.

There's a simple reason that no one has found a new Alzheimer's gene in more than a decade, and another reason that is less simple, and they both come down to the same thing: statistics. Risk-factor genes, the genes that will explain late-onset Alzheimer's, are inherently elusive, because carrying them does not automatically presage disease. More challenging, there may be many risk-factor genes, each with a potentially minute effect. To detect such genes requires a large, geographically isolated family study like Mayeux's, with reams of information about each individual's health issues, eating habits, and work and leisure pursuits, as well as genealogies that show the genetic path of the disease. Mayeux's thick books of pedigrees and his database of DNA allow researchers to define a person's genotype (what genes she carries) as well as a phenotype (what traits she embodies) and then to subdivide the phenotype according to which traits specifically correlate with the kind of dementia that characterizes Alzheimer's disease. On the nineteenth floor of the Presbyterian Hospital Building, the crucial diagnostic marker seemed to be a person's performance on certain memory tests, and the researchers were seeing a pattern in performance and disease which they hoped would show up in the genes.

"Age of onset is a wimpy phenotype," Mayeux said to no one in particular at one of the team's weekly genetics meetings in his office earlier this year. Mayeux thought that relying on family members to identify when a subject began showing signs of the disease was too subjective. "Memory is better. It's quantifiable."

"Delayed recognition is the most sensitive test we have for A.D.," Joe Lee, the geneticist, told him. "That and another test that I can't recall. I may be a subject for this study soon myself."

"We all may be," Mayeux said, laughing. It is a measure of the disease's prevalence that the seven people sitting around the table had a mother, a father, an aunt, a grandmother, and a grandfather with Alzheimer's.

A few months after that genetics meeting, Mayeux gathered together in his office a number of his researchers, including the neuropsychologist Yaakov Stern and the research physicians Angel Piriz and Rosarina Estevez. Soon, Santana rolled in a cart piled three feet high with files of first-time participants from the Dominican Republic and follow-up examinations of subjects who had been seen on previous visits, as well as files of their relatives in Washington Heights.

Santana, who was a college dropout when he started working for Mayeux and is now close to completing an M.B.A., handed out score sheets—officially called "clinical core diagnoses"—that looked rather like an I.R.S. 1040 short form, with various sections and schedules and subtotals, all leading to a bottom line: did the participant have Alzheimer's disease or not? To get there, the researchers had to rule out Parkinson's disease, prion disease, alcohol dementia, dementia with Lewy bodies, frontotemporal dementia, and anything else that might mimic the symptoms of Alzheimer's.

"We'll just get through as many as we get through, and then get the data to Joe Lee, so he can put it into the computer," Mayeux said, pulling a dozen folders off the cart. "Here's someone you saw," he said, waving a folder at Estevez, who was sitting next to him. "What was his blood pressure?" He gazed at her intently, not letting on that he was joking—in fourteen days in the Dominican Republic, the researchers had examined ninety-eight people, and Estevez could not possibly remember, nearly a month later, any individual's vital signs. She seemed a little stricken. As the newest member of the team, Estevez had not yet grown accustomed to Mayeux's ability to tease, compliment, and assert his authority, all in the same sentence. "One-seventy-five over ninety," she shot back. Mayeux looked stunned. "That's amazing. How did you do that? Did you know or did you guess?" But there was no time for an answer. "O.K., what else do we know about this guy?" he asked.

Accurately diagnosing a subject's condition is critical to the gene hunt, and the design of Mayeux's field studies, with follow-up visits every eighteen months, increased the odds that they would get it right. "The way most studies are done is that a person is seen once and diagnosed as either having Alzheimer's disease or not having Alzheimer's disease, and then not seen again," said Peter St George-Hyslop, who had used Mayeux's Dominican cell lines to identify some of the presenilin genes' mutations. "In the Washington Heights and Dominican studies, people are followed up again and again"—enabling pre-symptomatic Alzheimer's patients to be distinguished from genuinely normal control subjects. A few too many erroneous diagnoses, the researchers knew, could blur the subtle genetic patterns that they were looking for.

To refine its diagnostic powers, the Columbia group convened a meeting once a month to see how close its assessment of a person was to the incontrovertible pathological truth yielded by an autopsy. The meetings, in a crowded conference room, were run by the neurologist Lawrence Honig, another associate of the Taub Institute. The neurologists, pathologists, and psychologists typically sat at a long seminar table that dominated the room, and the rest squeezed in around them. Honig presented a patient's history and tentative diagnosis, then projected slides of the brain, first whole, then in slices, stained in pink and blue to show its dominant features. Then the doctors decided, based on that one piece of evidence they had been missing, if they had been right.

A week after the August meeting, I stopped by Honig's nineteenth-floor office, and he showed me slides of a woman whose case had been discussed that day. It was a good illustration of how difficult it could be, even with years of data, to be sure of a diagnosis. Honig, though in his early fifties and going bald, has the boyish affect of someone who has always been the smartest kid in the class, and he started out by walking me briskly through an abridged version of the woman's medical history: a clerical worker with a year of college, she had been first seen in 1992, at the age of sixty-eight. An alcoholic and a former smoker, she had numerous ailments—cirrhosis, gallstones, pulmonary disease, and facial-nerve palsy among them. In later years, she was found to carry the ApoE4 gene, and a brain scan showed some atrophy. But she had done well on all her medical and neuropsychological tests, both that first year and at every interval until 2000, when there was a decline in some of her memory scores. Two years later, there was a further decline in memory, and the clinicians discussed whether to move the woman from the non-affected category to a diagnosis of early-stage Alzheimer's. The neurologists, led by Honig, were pretty sure, based on the fact that the woman's test scores had been stable for more than a decade, that her recent memory problems were the result of her various physical ailments. The neuropsychologists were sticking by their norms. Unable to agree, they left the diagnosis unchanged, waiting to see what would show up the next time around. But by late 2004, when the woman was scheduled to be seen again, she was dying of congestive heart failure.

On his computer monitor, Honig called up a couple of slides of the woman's brain. There was nothing in the slices that looked like measles, which is how plaques show up when they've been stained, nor did the woman's brain appear especially shrunken, as Alzheimer's brains tend to be.

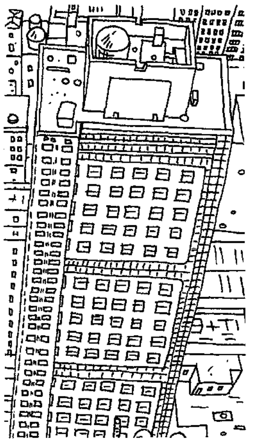
"We couldn't even find a single plaque," Honig beamed. "There were no signs of A.D. So I can crow that I was right. But we're not always right, so we have to be modest."

Neurologists have spent the past hundred years waiting for pathologists to prove them right, ever since 1906, when the German psychiatrist Alois Alzheimer autopsied the brain of a fifty-one-year-old woman who had exhibited the kinds of behavior that most of us now would reflexively call Alzheimer's disease, and found it riddled with something that looked like discarded wads of gum (plaques) and matted strands of hair (tangles). Pathologists, for their part, had waited almost as long to find out whether the plaques and tangles caused disease or were just an artifact of some other biological process.

What were they to make of the people who died with all the pathological evidence of Alzheimer's but suffered no dementia? And how to account for the presence of both plaques *and* tangles? Were the plaques, which are made of beta-amyloid, more important agents of disease than the tangles, which are composed of a protein called tau, or were the tangles the prime suspect, or were the two accomplices in fleecing memory?

These questions consumed researchers for decades. But what Professor Rudy Tanzi, of Harvard, has called the debate between "the Baptists and the Tauists"—those who believed in the supremacy of beta-amyloid and those who favored tau tangles—was becoming more civil all the time. The tauists, many of whom had felt marginalized, have seen their research money grow, which in science is a show of respect, and few were disputing the central role of beta-amyloid—especially a form of it called a-beta 42—in making an Alzheimer's brain, though what the plaques were doing in that brain could still rouse a heated discussion. Geneticists were the inadvertent arbiters of the dispute, for the answers were coming not from the examination of slices of tissue but from investigations at the molecular level.

"So much of the work that we've done, going forward, is asking, 'How do these genes cause disease? What are the biological pathways involved?' " Tanzi observed. "What was controversial was whether the plaques, where the toxic a-beta 42 eventually makes its home, are the cause of Alzheimer's disease. And the answer is probably not." Plaques are a problem because they cause inflammation, which can make things worse, but more recent data have directed attention to the way the peptide—long before it has formed into plaques—interferes with the synapses. "For all we know, plaques may be the result of a beneficial attempt by the brain to sequester a-beta 42 away so you don't have it in synapses anymore," Tanzi said. "It's probably the newly made a-beta 42 that is relentlessly attacking the synapses, and probably this is why an Alzheimer's patient has trouble remembering what happened five minutes ago. When you impair the synapse, eventually it starts to break down."



This point was illustrated, last fall, in a paper in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*. The title of the paper, "Fibrillar Amyloid Deposition Leads to Local Synaptic Abnormalities and Breakage of Neuronal Branches," was not exactly sensational, but the accompanying photographs, showing an Alzheimer's-like condition in genetically altered mice, were vivid, and chilling. In the pictures, dendrites and axons, the parts of a neuron that carry information to and from a cell, highlighted in a radiant green, start out as long, robust, motile tentacles. Then they encounter the amyloid, which shows up as tomato-red clumps. The tentacles break apart, wither, and disappear.

One of the authors of the article, Karen Duff, was also the "author" of one of the original transgenic Alzheimer's mice. Duff is a young British molecular neuroscientist who developed the first mouse model of the presenilins mutation when she was a postdoctoral fellow. (Mice don't naturally develop Alzheimer's, and must be genetically modified to do so.) She continues to make models of neurodegenerative diseases, at the Nathan Kline Institute, in Orangeburg, New York, on the grounds of the Rockland Psychiatric Center, and has supplied Mayeux's team at Columbia with senility-prone rodents. Her office is incongruously cheery, with a bobble-head doll of James Watson on the desk, a cuckoo clock on the wall, and a stuffed-mouse toy perched on a bookshelf. The real mice are across the hall, in clear-plastic cages that resemble neonatal incubators. Duff, who recently received a $7.5-million grant from the National Institutes of Health to work on tangle diseases, was raising a special line of mice that were prone to developing various frontal-lobe dementias.

To model a human disease in a mouse, Duff uses a tiny needle to microinject select bits of human DNA into a mouse egg. ("You're going from the outside to the inside and sometimes the eggs burst.") The introduced DNA integrates with the mouse DNA and is passed along to offspring. The first mouse born with this engineered DNA is called the founder mouse. Breeding the founders produces the "models" that are then used to observe the progression of a disease or to test therapies.

"When I was in school, I wanted to study physics, but I couldn't do the math," Duff said as she picked up a paraplegic mouse and gently stroked its back. "Then, when I was sixteen, I went to a lecture about genes and learned that you could change one thing in three billion and have an effect on the whole organism, and I said, 'That's it.' I wanted to make that one change and see what it did, what pathways were involved, and then go on to treat it. My postdoctoral project was making transgenic mice. Making mice is very hard. You have to be very specific with what you've done. If I have a demented mouse that can't get around a water maze, I know that it is because I changed one gene. The hard part is figuring out the steps in between." She ran her finger along the sick mouse's spine, then laid it back in its cage.

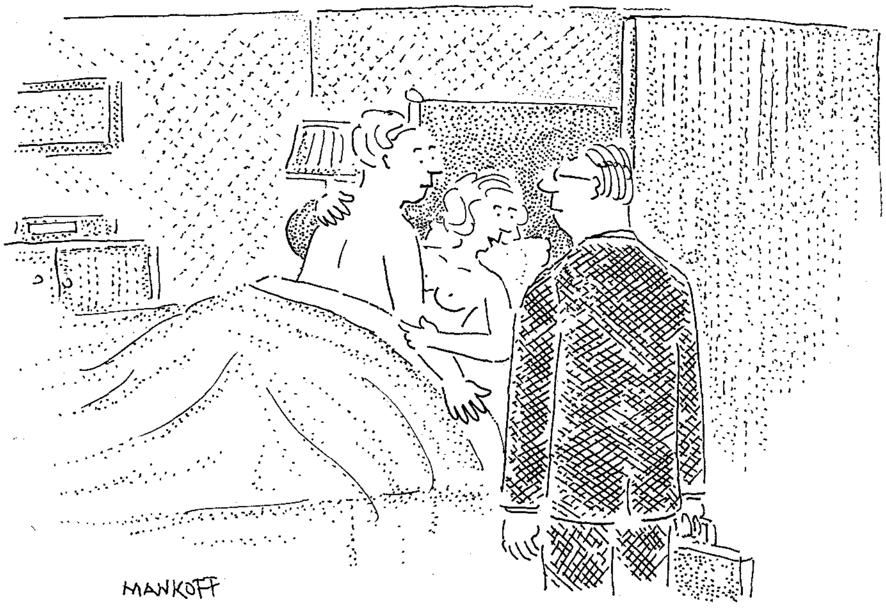
Duff doesn't create new mouse models for other researchers anymore, but she'll make an exception for Mayeux, as soon as he has a new Alzheimer's gene to give her. "It's a symbiotic relationship," she explained. "The geneticists want their findings to be more than a gene on a piece of paper. They want to see that it really does cause disease by putting it into animals. Richard needs me to put the genes in the animals, and I need someone like him to give me the genes to put into my animal models to see what they do. It's a multipart process."

On the morning I visited the neurology mouse lab of the Taub Institute, a lab technician was taping a breathing mask over the snout of an inert black mouse, dosing it with anesthetic gas. Once sedated, the mouse was wrapped in plastic and laid on a tiny bed that fit into a long tube, and its head was strapped in place. Then the technician inserted the tube into a miniature magnetic-resonance scanner that had been designed to look inside the bodies of small animals. On the screen were images of the mouse's brain and its beating heart. The mouse looked peaceful, unperturbed by the percussive hydraulic noises issuing from the machine.

The mouse nursery, where this mouse was raised, was one flight up. There were white mice, black mice, wild mice, sick mice, genetically altered mice, and, though I didn't know it then, a mouse that would later provide tangible support to a hypothesis being worked out by the neurologist Scott Small, about the origin of late-onset Alzheimer's disease.

Small, who is forty-four, was in medical school when the mice were being developed. American by birth, he had grown up outside Tel Aviv and served in the Israeli special forces during Israel's 1982 war with Lebanon, before moving back to the States to attend N.Y.U. He is an intellectually nimble scientist, able to jump effortlessly between cell biology, physiology, electrical engineering, pharmacology, and philosophy. He is also a dedicated if hamstrung clinician. I had been in the examining room when he gave a diagnosis of Alzheimer's to an eighty-six-year-old woman, a diagnosis that was more devastating to her son, a muscular New York City police officer, than it was at that point to her. Small talked to the son with tremendous compassion, but, as soon as he and his mother were gone, slammed his fist on the desk in anger. He was furious—with the universe, with science, with himself—that the best he could offer were free samples of a drug that might help for a couple of months at most.

In his pathophysiology lab, Small had developed a way to use functional magnetic-resonance imaging to see into specific regions of the brain at work—to look at actual cerebral circuits, the brain's moving parts. Using both the imaging and a gene-sifting technique called microarray, he examined discrete sections of the hippocampus, the part of the brain that controls the recording of new memories and is known to deteriorate in Alzheimer's patients. Ultimately, as Small explained in a paper published in the *Annals of Neurology* last week, he determined that something called the retromer complex might be involved in the disease.



"Believe me, it's not what it is."

• •

"Scott is one of a new generation of what are called 'translational scientists,'" Mayeux told me one day, explaining Small's role at Taub. "He can translate what's happening in a cell in a lab to a human who is sick—from the bench to the bedside and back again. My focus is on characterizing the human disaster. Scott visualizes what I'm saying and brings it down to the cellular level, tests it in a mouse, and brings it back to the human level."

When I went to the Presbyterian Hospital Building to talk to Small in his artfully underfurnished workspace, he was soon standing in front of a classroom-size chalkboard, drawing diagrams. He was trying to explain how the retromer complex works. One diagram had a big circle with two smaller circles inside it, and a Lego-like multi-decker bus alongside it. "God solved the problem of having different kinds of molecules that didn't like each other by compartmentalizing the cells," Small said, tapping the small circles with a piece of chalk. "You have a cell, which is the big circle, and you have different compartments called organelles, which are the small circles. You need a way to take something from one to another." He pointed to the multi-decker bus. "That's what the trafficking molecules do. They act like a shuttle bus, taking cargo from one place to another."

One of the mechanisms for moving proteins from one organelle to another is the retromer complex. Until five years ago, it had been observed only in yeast. Two years ago, after cell biologists found it in humans, a number of retromer molecules showed up in Small's microarray analysis of hippocampal cells. Among them was a protein known as VPS26. Investigating further, Small found that, fifteen years earlier, the protein had been of interest to researchers studying developmental defects. In a journal article about VPS26, he found a reference to a mouse bred without the protein. By chance, the modeller was at Columbia—and the mouse was still being bred. Small and his associates ran the mouse through a battery of cognitive and biochemical tests and, as they reported last month at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience, in Washington, D.C., found that in the absence of VPS26 the mouse had memory defects.

"So how is the retromer complex related to Alzheimer's disease?" Small asked, getting back to his diagram. "We believe that the cargo being moved around the cell by the retromer is the amyloid precursor protein, APP, and that when there's a retromer dysfunction APP builds up. If our model is right, we've uncovered something completely novel that contributes to late-onset Alzheimer's. What we've found is primary to the disease process. We've shown it

“You were a stray before and you can be a stray again.”

in a petri dish, and now we're working with the mouse, and the results look very promising. I can't say more than that right now.”

By the summer of 2004, the Columbia team, working with research groups at the University of Toronto and Boston University, had a hunch about where a rogue risk-factor gene resided. Having searched through the entire genome for places where shared patterns of DNA showed up in people with Alzheimer's disease, having pored over many thousands of genes, some of them four spreadsheets long, they began scrutinizing a number of genes that had appeared in their random-association studies, some of which had also showed up in Small's microarray analyses.

It was standard work for Joe Lee, the Columbia group's unassuming statistical geneticist, who could reliably be found staring at his computer monitor. He began examining blocks of DNA, looking for variations in the genetic code that were associated with the disease. Each block—what the scientists call a haplotype—was like a sentence in a paragraph from a chapter of a book. By comparing the length of that particular sentence in every copy of the book, the researchers could see in which copies the sentence was the same and in which ones it was garbled. If the misconstructed sentence tended to show up in people with Alzheimer's, then there might be a connection between those two things. The scientists would examine the sentence more closely, looking for the precise character, the one extra consonant, the repeated verb—something—in that particular sentence which was consistent in the copies owned by the people who were sick.

While the Toronto group, led by Peter St George-Hyslop, examined the DNA of a few hundred families of European descent, and the B.U. team, led by Lindsay Farrer, looked at the genetics of siblings, Lee focussed on the thousands of samples gathered from the Dominican Republic and Washington Heights studies. By its size alone, Mayeux's genetic library, with its branching trees of large extended families that often spanned two or more generations, was a powerful instrument for detecting which haplotypes were associated with the disease. But the design and the scope of the complementary Columbia studies gave Lee another advantage. Where the large families from the Dominican Republic enabled him to find disease-linked haplotypes among symptomatic subjects and their relatives, he was also able to see whether those same chunks showed up in the Dominicans enrolled in the Washington Heights study.

Meanwhile, as Lee and the researchers in Toronto and Boston systematically moved along the chromosomes, they began to converge on the same gene. It was as if, having read the same book cover to cover, the teams had each come to focus on a single sentence. Yet the exact place in the gene where something went askew was different for different populations; it was as if, among a group of African-American siblings studied by the Boston University group, the sentence began with an extra article; among the people of European ancestry studied by the Toronto group, it was missing the question mark at the end; and, among the Caribbean-Hispanics studied by the Columbia group, a word in the middle of the sentence was misspelled. So there seemed to be at least three ways that the gene in question could go wrong.

The three lead scientists were growing more confident that the gene they were studying was one of the undiscovered late-onset risk-factor genes. The association was strong, not just in one sample population but in five, and not in one racial group but in three, scattered around the globe. Each researcher had replicated the findings of the others, and in their line of work replication was rare. By nature, the three were skeptics, but, as the evidence mounted, they found it harder to dismiss.

“The ‘Aha!’ moment happens to different people at different times, and sometimes it never really happens,” St George-Hyslop said. “We are aware of little bits of data as they come out that say, ‘Yes, it's real,’ but not very strongly, so what you get is not really a eureka moment but something that is incremental. It starts out as ‘Uh-huh, but it's probably a fluke,’ to ‘Maybe it's not a fluke,’ to ‘This could be real, let me see what I can do to make it go away,’ to ‘Well, it seems pretty robust, but there are still problems,' to 'We've taken this as far as we can and we concede that there are many things to be done on this story, but before we do too much more it needs to be put in the hands of some other people, with totally different data sets and totally different ways of analyzing things, and see if they get the same results.' "

For months, the name of the promising new gene was written on a whiteboard near the door in Richard Mayeux's office, but I had no idea that it was the gene we were talking about, since no one would utter its name in my presence. There was some concern that if I knew it I might inadvertently tip off another research group, which could claim the finding as its own. In genetics there is only one winner, Karen Duff had said in the spring, describing how, during the race to make the first presenilin mouse, she had been reluctant to spare the time to get a broken arm set, for fear that she would lose too much ground to her competitors. When Scott Small had finished explaining his work on the retromer complex, he said, "If tomorrow someone publishes the whole story I just told you, I can cry till I'm blue in the face, but they will have published first." It was only at the end of the summer, when I was sitting with Mayeux in a cabin on a lake in the Adirondacks where he was vacationing with his wife, taking forty- and fifty-mile bike rides almost every day, that he told me the name, and I realized that it had been in front of me for half the year.

By then, though, I had come to understand and appreciate the gene not for what it was called but for what it might do—for how it might add to the amyloid story, and how it could give researchers a new way to treat Alzheimer's. Scientists have already launched clinical trials on vaccines that aim to mobilize antibodies against amyloid plaques. At an earlier stage of development, a number of geneticists—Karen Duff and Rudy Tanzi among them—have been working on drugs that exploit the molecular pathways described by the original, early-onset Alzheimer's genes. These novel molecular therapies are meant to intervene long before plaques form.

"Any way of getting at a molecule—whether it's from microarray, or looking at genes, or God whispering in your ear to look at a particular protein—when you can pinpoint the primary molecular defect, you're more likely to develop effective treatments," Small explained. "That's Pharmacology 101."

Small, in his own lab and also in collaboration with researchers at Brandeis University and the University of Wisconsin, has already begun to look for a biochemical way to take advantage of his microarray and mouse findings in order to regulate the buildup of amyloid. Together, the scientists are developing a screening assay to test potential compounds, and expect to be able to turn over to chemical engineers a handful of potential drugs in a couple of years; the engineers would modify the drugs' structure to make them more amenable to entering the brain. From there, the compounds would be tested in mice, and, two or three years after that, if all went well, human trials would begin. "Right now, we're two years into a ten-year process," Small said.

Mayeux thinks that, a decade from now, your doctor will look up your gene profile and decide whether you have a high risk for Alzheimer's, and then give you a prophylactic treatment of some sort. "Right now, you don't know what the hell to do," Mayeux said that day in the Adirondacks. "You don't know whether you should take vitamins, whether you should take ibuprofen, and, if you do, if you'll get a stroke, whether you should take estrogen, and if that will give you a stroke. People tell you to use your brain, to use your body, and those are all well and good, but you don't know if it's a lifetime of doing those things, you don't know if it's starting to do crosswords when you're ninety. If we can solve some of these genetic puzzles, we'll know how to treat the disease."

It was three years since he, St George-Hyslop, and Farrer had begun their active collaboration, and despite their successes Mayeux remained circumspect. Having converged on a gene, they now had to find the mutations—the specific changes in the base sequences—and they had to show how these changes influenced the course of the disease. With the possibility of multiple Alzheimer's-linked mutations among them, it might be another few months of intensive effort at the very least before they could be sure.

"Let's say this is a real finding," Mayeux said. "You can bet there will be a ton of work on how this particular gene fits into the big picture. It's really a jigsaw puzzle with five hundred pieces. You can look at it and see some of the key pieces and you can tell that there is a brain on a brown background, but you can't figure out where all the other pieces go. Then you get one piece in there that fits and it helps you get a whole section together. We think we got a piece—it may be more—but you don't know till you nail it. The question is: 'How does a normal protein get misdirected and altered in such a way that it then becomes toxic to nerve cells?' The important point is not that it's this particular gene, but that it's part of a system that is important in the processing of beta-amyloid under normal circumstances and perturbations in that system are serious and could lead to disease. And that this is a modifiable system. Finding the gene is one thing, but once you have a gene it becomes a potential target, something to aim at. That's what you do this for."

Still, Mayeux knew as well as anyone that the road from gene to drug was linear only on paper. In a petri dish, in a mouse, in a person, almost anything—or nothing at all—could happen. Initial attempts to make an Alzheimer's vaccine had progressed to human efficacy trials when, in 2002, twenty participants inexplicably developed encephalitis, and the trials were halted. The first risk-factor gene, ApoE4, had been found in 1993, and more than a decade later nobody had figured out how to take advantage of it therapeutically.

"What I feel best about is that the collections I'm making are going to be around for a while," Mayeux said. "Collecting these Dominican families, putting the data together, having them very well characterized, having the cell lines—if it's not us who find the gene, then someone will find the genetic variant eventually and that will help.

"It's a lot like the movie 'The Maltese Falcon,' " he went on. "You look for, you look for, you look for, and you find something—and then you realize it's not the right thing, and by that evening you're booked on another ship to begin the next search. If this fizzles out, we'll be on that boat." ♦

FICTION

LA CONCHITA

BY T. CORAGHESSAN BOYLE

In my business, where you put something like forty to forty-five thousand miles a year on your vehicle and the sweet suck of the engine at 3500 r.p.m. is like another kind of breathing, you can't afford distractions. Can't afford to get tired or lazy or lift your eyes from the road to appreciate the way the fog reshapes the palms on Ocean Avenue or the light slips down the flanks of the mountains on that mind-blowing stretch of Highway 1 between Malibu and Oxnard. Get distracted and you could wind up meat. I know that. The truckers know that. But just about everybody else—Honda drivers, especially, and I'm sorry—they don't even know they're behind the wheel and conscious half the time. I've tried to analyze it, I have. They want value, the Honda drivers, value and reliability, but they don't want to pay for the real deal—German engineering is what I'm talking about here—and yet they still seem to think they're part of some secret society that allows them to cut people off at will, to take advantage because they're so in the know. So hip. So Honda. And, yes, I carry a gun, a Glock Nine I keep in a special compartment I had built into the leather panel of the driver's-side door, but that doesn't mean I want to use it. Or would use it again. Except in extremis.

The only time I did fire it was during that rash of freeway shootings a few months back—a statistical bubble, the police called it—when people were getting popped at the rate of two a week in the Greater L.A. area. I could never figure it, really. You see some jerk swerving in and out of traffic, tailgating, and maybe you give him the finger and maybe he comes up on you, but you're awake, aren't you? You've got an accelerator and a brake pedal, right? But most people, I guess, don't realize that they've just made the driver charging up alongside them homicidal or that their engine is on fire or the road dropping off into a crater the size of the Sea of Tranquillity, because they've got their cell phone clamped to the side of their head and they're doing their nails or reading the paper. Don't laugh. I've seen them watching TV, gobbling kung pao out of the carton, doing crossword puzzles, and talking on two cells at once—all at eighty miles an hour. Anyway, I just fired two slugs—*blip blip*. Didn't even know my finger was on the trigger. Plus, of course, I was aiming low—just trying to perforate his rocker panels or the idiotic big-dick off-road Super Avenger tires that had him sitting about twelve feet up off the ground. I'm not proud of it. And I probably shouldn't have gone that far. But he cut me off—twice—and if he'd given me the finger it would have been one thing, but he didn't even know it, didn't even know he'd nearly run me into the median two times in the space of a minute.

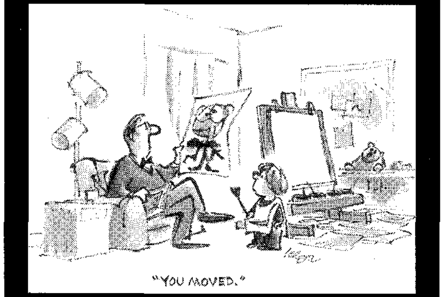
SEYMOUR CHWAST

On the day I'm thinking of, though, everybody seemed to keep their distance. It was just past noon and raining, the ocean stretching out on my left like a big seething cauldron, the surface of the roadway slick beneath the wheels—so slick and soft and ill-defined that I had to slow to seventy in places to keep from hydroplaning. But this wasn't just rain. This was one cell in a string of storms that had stalled over the coast for a week, sucking load after load of moisture up out of the sea and dropping it on the hills that had burned clear of vegetation the winter before. I was already running late because of a slide at Topanga Canyon, boulders the size of S.U.V.s in the middle of the road, cops in slickers waving their flashlights, down to two lanes, then one, and finally—I heard this on the radio after I got through—down to none. Road closed. All she wrote.

I didn't like driving in the rain—it was just asking for disaster. My fellow-drivers, riding their brakes and clinging to the wheel as if it were some kind of voodoo fetish that would protect them against drunks, curves, potholes, errant coyotes, and sheet metal carved into knives, went to pieces the minute the first drop hit the windshield. As you might expect, the accident rate shot up something like three hundred per cent every time it rained, and, as I said, this wasn't just rain in the ordinary sense. But I had a delivery to make in Santa Barbara, an urgent delivery, and if I couldn't guarantee door-to-door faster than FedEx or Freddie Altamirano (my major competitor, who rode a Pro-Street FXR and moved like a spirit raptured to Heaven) then I was out of business. Plus, this wasn't just the usual packet of bonds or stock certificates or the blockbuster screenplay passing from writer to director and back again; this was the kind of thing I handled maybe two or three times a month at most—and it never failed to give me a thrill. In the trunk, anchored firmly between two big blocks of Styrofoam, was a human liver packed in a bag of ice slurry inside a Bud Light Fun-in-the-Sun cooler, and if that sounds ridiculous I'm sorry. That's how it's done. Simple fact. Ninety minutes earlier, I'd picked it up at LAX because the S.B. airport was closed, due to flooding, and if you want a definition of time-sensitive this was it. The recipient, a twenty-seven-year-old mother of three, was on life support at University Hospital, and I was running late and there wasn't much I could do about it.

At any rate, I was coming up on La Conchita—a little town no bigger than a trailer court, carved out of the hill where the freeway dips down to the ocean—just rounding the big curve at Mussel Shoals and dropping down to fourth to blow past a U-Haul truck (the worst, the very worst, but that's another story), when the hillside gave way. There was a series of sharp cracks, which I, at first, took to be lightning hitting the hill, and then a deep reverberant concussion, as if all the air had been knocked out of the day. By this point, I was shifting down, hyper-aware of the chain of brake lights flung up across the road in front of me and of the U-Haul, piloted by a zombie on his way to Goleta or Lompoc with his zombie girlfriend at his side and their little white dog in her lap, bearing down on me from behind. I was able to stop. They weren't. They skidded past me and hammered into the back end of a Mercedes with its panic lights on, the whole shimmering orange-and-white truck lifting up on two wheels before crashing down on its side.

I'll say right up front that I've never been much in an emergency—and when you're behind the wheel as often as I am you see plenty of emergencies, believe me. I don't know C.P.R., don't know how to stay calm or counsel anybody else to stay calm, either, and I've been lucky, because it's never been me wrapped around the telephone pole or nodding over the windshield and nobody I know has ever choked at the dinner table or clutched his heart or started hemorrhaging from the mouth and ears.



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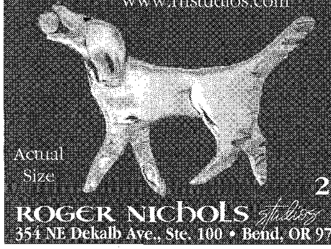

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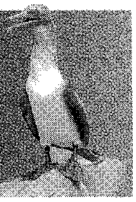

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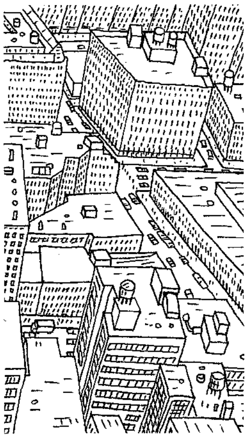
I saw the dog lying there in the road like a heap of rags, saw the driver of the moving truck haul himself up out of the window like a pearl diver coming up for air, saw the rain eclipse him. And the first thing I did—for my own sake and for the sake of whoever else might be tooling up behind me—was pull the car off the road, as far up on the shoulder as I could take it without fear of getting stuck. I was just reaching for my cell to dial 911, the road blocked, the day shot, my mind churning and the donor organ sitting there undelivered and unincorporated and getting staler by the minute, when things got worse, a whole lot worse.

I don't know if the average person really has much of an idea of what a mud slide involves. I certainly didn't—not before I started driving for a living, anyway. You'd see footage on the six-o'clock news, telephone poles down, trees knocked askew, a car or two flattened, and a garage staved in, but it didn't seem like much. It wasn't hot lava, wasn't an earthquake or one of the firestorms that burned through this subdivision or that, incinerating a couple hundred homes every fall. Maybe it was the fault of the term itself—*mud slide*. It sounded innocuous, almost cozy, as if it might be one of the new attractions at Magic Mountain, or vaguely sexy, like the women's mud-wrestling that was all the rage when I was in high school and too young to get in the door. But a mud slide, as I now know, is nothing short of an avalanche, where instead of snow you've got four hundred thousand tons of liquefied dirt bristling with rocks and tree trunks coming at you with the force of a tsunami. And it moves fast, faster than you would think.



The sound I'd heard, even through the rolled-up windows and the ready voice of the narrator of the book-on-tape I'd checked out of the library, because I never go anywhere without a good story to take my mind off the raging idiots all around me, was the sudden angry shriek of the bulkhead in back of La Conchita giving way. Steel beams snapped like chicken bones, railroad ties went airborne. Up ahead of me, beyond the overturned U-Haul, a few cars had got through, but now a vanguard of boulders came sluicing across the freeway, followed by a soupy river of mud. A rock the size of a cannonball thumped into the underside of the U-Haul truck and a fistful of pellets—gravel, I guess—sprayed the side of my car, and that was going to mean a new paint job, I knew it, maybe even bodywork. The rain quickened. The mud spread out across the pavement, seething around the tires and underneath the car and beyond, and soon dark tongues of it had pushed across the southbound lanes, too.

What did I do? I got out of the car, the normal reaction, and immediately my shoes filled with sludge. The mud was no more than a foot or so deep, and here, at the edge of the slide, it was the consistency of pancake batter. But darker. And it smelled of something long buried and dug up again, damp and raw as an open grave, and for a moment there I flashed on my father's funeral, the squared-off edges of the hole with its fringe of roots, my mother trying to be stoic and my uncle putting an arm around my shoulders as if that could help. Let me say that it wasn't a pleasant smell and leave it at that.

Doors slammed. Somebody was shouting. I turned my head to look up the road and there was the driver of the U-Haul, pulling his wife or girlfriend or whoever she was up out of the cab even as she reacted to the sight of the dog lying there on a clean stretch of pavement, with the mud, working to its own logic, flowing around it. Behind me were at least a hundred cars, bottled up and idling, their lights dully illuminating the scene, windshield wipers clapping like a very tired audience. People were running up the street. A pickup just north of the overturned U-Haul began to float off, sustained on a wave of mud as if it were a dinghy drifting away on the tide. My jacket was soaked through, my hair hanging in my face. The liver wasn't getting any fresher.

Suddenly, unaccountably, I found myself at the trunk of the car. I inserted the key and flipped it open, and I don't really know why—just to reassure myself, I guess. The lid of the cooler eased back and there it was, the liver, smooth and burnished, more pink than red—and it wasn't like meat, not at all, more like something sculpted out of very soft stone. But it was O.K., it was fine, I told myself, and I should just stay calm. I figured we had an hour, more or less, before things began to get critical. It was then that the woman with the dog—she was bent over it in the rain, wailing, and the water dripping from the end of her nose was pink with the blood leaching out of her scalp—looked up and shouted something to me. She might have been asking if I knew anything about dogs. Or if she could use my cell to call a vet. Or if I had a knife, an oxygen mask, a G.P.S. locator, a blanket. I don't know what she said, actually. She wanted something, but I couldn't hear her over the rattle of all those idling engines, the hiss of the rain, the shouts and curses, and in the next moment somebody else was there, some stranger, and he was taking care of it. I ducked back into the car, just to get out of the rain—mud everywhere, mud on the carpets, the doorframe, the console—and punched in the cell number of the assisting physician at the hospital.

"There's a problem," I said.

His voice came back at me in a thinly amplified yelp. "What do you mean? Where are you?"

"I'm maybe fifteen miles south, at La Conchita, that's what I mean, but I can't get through because there's some kind of slide—it just happened—and it's blocking the road. Totally." For the first time, I looked up at the mountain outside the window and saw the scar there, the trail of displaced earth and the crushed houses. Everything was gray with the rain.

"How long before they clear it?"

"Actually? Could be a while."

He was silent, and I tried to picture him, nobody I knew, an intern maybe, glasses, short hair because it was easier to maintain when your life wasn't your own, biting his lip and staring out the window into the pall of rain. "Is there any way I can get to *you*? I mean, if I jump in the car and—"

"Maybe," I said, and I wanted this to work in the worst way, because my reputation was on the line here and that woman needed her liver she'd been waiting for for Christ knew how long. Somebody was freshly dead in Phoenix and this was the best match, and I'd have walked it there if I could have, no doubt about it, walked till my feet turned to stumps, but I had to be honest with him. "You got to realize the traffic's already backed up in both directions," I said, and I wasn't calm, wasn't calm at all. "I mean nothing's going through. There's an accident just in front of me and there's mud and rocks all over the road. In both directions. Even if you leave now you're not going to be able to get within miles of here, so you tell me. Tell me what you want me to do. Tell me."

Another silence. "All right," he said finally. His voice was pinched. "You know how urgent this is. How crucial. We'll get this done. We will. Just keep your cell on, all right? And don't do anything till I get back to you."

I must have sat there for five minutes at least, just staring out into the rain, the cell clutched in my hand. I was wet through and I'd begun to shiver, so I turned the engine over and got the heater going. The mud was still flowing, I could see that much, and the white dog had disappeared, along with the couple from the U-Haul. Apparently they'd found shelter somewhere, in the little gas station-cum-grocery store that was La Conchita's sole commercial establishment, or in one of the cars stalled behind me. There were people out on the pavement, hunched-over forms wading through the mud and shouting at one another, and I thought I heard the distant keening of a siren—police, fire, ambulance—and wondered how they expected to get through. You might find it hard to believe, but I really didn't think much about the danger, though if another section of the hillside had let go we'd all have been buried, no doubt about that—no, I was more concerned about the package in the trunk. Why hadn't they called me back? What were they waiting for? I could have been slogging down the road already, the cooler propped up on one shoulder, and somebody—I thought of an ambulance from the hospital—could have met me a couple miles up the freeway. But no, the ambulances would all be busy with the wreckage in front of

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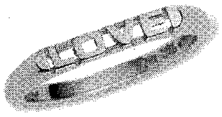

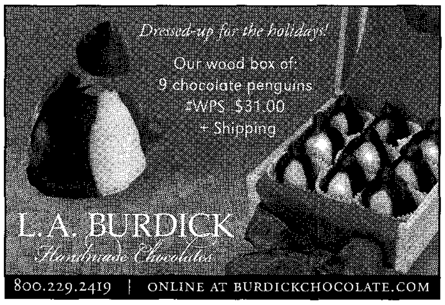

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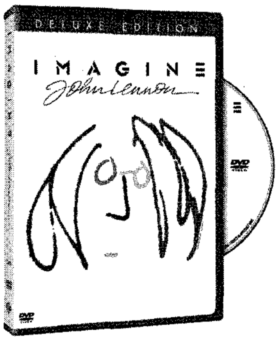

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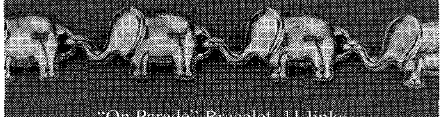

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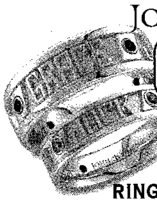

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me, with people trapped in their cars, bleeding from head wounds, their own organs ruptured, bones broken. Or in those houses. I turned my head to look out the passenger's-side window at the ghost of La Conchita, at the rectangular grid of split-level homes and trailers up against the hillside which had been there ten minutes ago and were gone now. Just then, just as I turned, a streaming dark figure surged up against the car and a woman's face appeared at the window. "Open up!" she demanded. "Open up!"

I was caught off guard—startled, actually, the way she came up on me. It took me a minute to react, but she didn't have a minute, and she was pounding at the window now, frantic, both hands in motion, her eyes cutting into me through the smeared-over glass. I hit the button for the window and that smell came at me, that graveyard stink, and there she was, a woman in her twenties with smudged makeup, her hair wet and hanging loose like the frayed ends of a rope. Before the window was all the way down she thrust her head in and reached across the seat to grab hold of my wrist as if to tug me out of the car, going on about her husband, her husband and her little girl, her baby, her little girl, her little girl, her voice so strained and constricted I could barely make out what she was saying. "You've got to help," she said, jerking at my arm. "Help me. *Please*."

And then, before I knew what I was doing, I was out the door and into the mud again and I never even thought to crank the window back up, her urgency shooting through me like an electric jolt, and why I thought to take the gun, to tuck it into my waistband, I'll never know. Maybe because panic is infectious and violence the only thing to soothe it. I don't know. Maybe I was thinking of looters—or of myself, of insulating myself from whatever was out there, good, bad, or indifferent. I came around the front of the car, the mud to my knees, and without a word she grabbed hold of my hand and started pulling me forward. "Where're we going?" I shouted into the rain, but she just tugged at me and slashed through the debris until we were across the inundated railroad tracks—running now, both of us—and into La Conchita, where the mud flowed and the houses lay buried.

Though I must have passed by the place a hundred times, doing eighty, eighty-five, with one eye out for the C.H.P. and the other for the inevitable moron blocking the fast lane, I don't think I'd actually stopped there more than once or twice—and then only to get gas and only in an emergency situation, when I'd been so intent on a delivery I'd forgotten to check the fuel gauge. What I knew of La Conchita was limited to what I'd heard—that it was cheap, or relatively cheap, because the hillside had given way in '95, obliterating a few houses and scaring off buyers and Realtors alike, but that people kept coming back to it because they had short memories, and the little community there, a hundred and fifty houses or so and the store I mentioned, exerted a real pull on the imagination. This was the last of the Southern California beach towns that anybody could afford, a throwback to earlier, happier times before the freeways came and the megalopolis ate everything up. I'd always meant to stop and look around and yet never seemed to find the time—the whole place couldn't have been more than a quarter mile from one end to the other, and that goes by in a heartbeat at eighty-five.

But I was here now, right in the thick of it, skirting the tentacles of mud and fumbling up the street to where the slide had broken through, and this woman, her bare legs mud-streaked and her shoulders pinched with urgency, never let go of my wrist. And that was strange, a strange feeling, as if I were back in elementary school and bound to one of the other kids in some weird variant of the three-legged race. Except that this woman was a total stranger and this was no game. I moved without thinking, without question, my legs heavy with the mud. By the time we reached the top of the street, a long block and a half in, all of it uphill, I was out of breath—heaving, actually—but whether my lungs burned or my shoes were ruined beyond salvage or the finish on the car was damaged to the tune of five hundred bucks or more didn't matter, because the whole thing suddenly came clear to me. This was the real deal. This was affliction and loss, horror unfolding, houses crushed like eggshells, cars swallowed up, sections of roof flung out across the street and nothing visible beneath but tons of wet mud and a scatter of splintered beams. I was

THE BIRTHDAY PARTY

Now she can say her age, which she pronounces
carefully, as "tew," sometimes flashing a victory sign.
It's all over by the age of two, claimed J. M. Barrie, in "Peter Pan,"
and such is the invidious nature of great literature that I find
myself looking carefully at her, to see if it's all over,
and if it is, what it was. She seems not to have noticed.
When someone shut out the lights and in the darkness
set her cake on fire, she clung to me harder.
And when we leaned together to blow out the candles
she understood there was magic at work,
for now she keeps blowing at things to see if they will go out.
The dumb mothers and their babies came today
to eat cake, and not one brought a gift for this child,
which offended me, and felt like a mortal wound—
not for the sake of the toys, which are tiresome,
and take up space and are seldom wanted or needed—
but because one brings gifts nearing a threshold,
it quiets the gods.
My own household god broke the coffeepot,
and sent them scurrying back to the walk,
and I'd have tossed pans and cups after them
except I am older than two, it's all over for me,
I have learned to pretend to be polite.
And Lily, little Lily, smiled and waved her hand
blithely, glad to see the company come,
equally glad to see them go—
because she is "happy!"—her favorite word—
and because she is two, and mighty.

—*Liz Rosenberg*

staggered. I was in awe. I became aware of a dog barking somewhere, a muffled sound, as if it were barking through a gag. "Help," the woman repeated, choking on her own voice. "God damn it, do something! *Dig!*" And only then did she let go of my wrist. She gave me one frantic look and threw herself down in the muck, flailing at the earth with her bare hands.

Again, as I said, I'm no hero—I'm barely capable of taking care of myself, if you want to know the truth—but I fell in beside her without a word. She was sobbing now, her face slack with shock and the futility of it all—we needed a shovel, a pick, a backhoe, for Christ's sake, but the tools were buried, everything was buried. "I was at the store," she kept saying, chanting it as her fingers raked and bled and her nails tore and her blouse clung wet to the hard frenetic muscles of her digging, "at the store, at the store," and my mind flew right out of my body. I snatched up a length of two-by-four and began to tear at the earth as if I'd been born to it. The dirt flew. I knew nothing. I was in a trench up to my knees, up to my waist, the mud sliding back in almost as fast as I could fling it out, and she was right there beside me with her martyred hands, looking like Alice, like my Alice when I first met her, with her snaking hair and the smile that pulled you across the room, Alice before things went bad. And I wondered: Would Alice dig *me* out? Would she even care?

Back, shoulders, bending, flinging, gouging at the face of the earth: will it sound ridiculous if I say that in that hard labor, that digging, that sweat and panic and the headlong burning rush of adrenaline, I found my wife again? And that I saw something there, something in the fierceness of this woman's need and the

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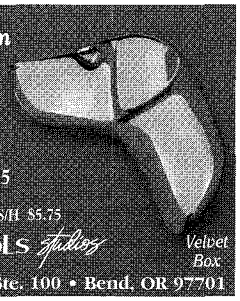

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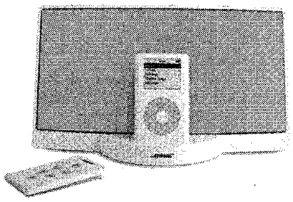

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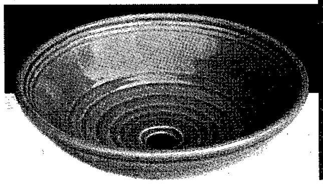

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taint of her smeared limbs that I found incredibly sexy? I didn’t know the husband. I didn’t know the little girl. I was digging, yes—in my place, the average person would have done the same—but I was no hero. I wasn’t digging to save anybody. I was digging for her. And there came a point, ten, fifteen minutes into it, when I saw what was going to happen as clearly as if I could predict the future. Those people were dead down there, long dead, choked and asphyxiated, and she was going to grieve, this hot young woman, this girl in muddy shorts and a soaked-through top whose name I didn’t even know, who kept saying over and over that she’d gone to the store for a can of tomato paste to add to the sauce, the sauce simmering on the stove, while her husband set the table and the little girl bent over her coloring book. I saw that. The grief. The grief was only to be expected. And I saw that in time—six months, a year maybe—she was going to get over it, very gradually, in a tender and fragile way, and then I would be there for her, right there at her side, and she could cleave to me the way Alice couldn’t and wouldn’t. It was Biblical is what it was. And I was a seer—a fortune-teller—for fifteen hard minutes. But, let me tell you, digging for somebody’s life is a desperate business, and you don’t know your thoughts, you just don’t.

At some point, a neighbor appeared with a shovel, and I couldn’t tell you whether this guy was thirty or eighty, ten feet tall or a hunchbacked dwarf, because in one unbroken motion I flung down the two-by-four, snatched the shovel from him, and started stabbing at the earth all on my own, feeling the kind of ecstasy only the saints must know. I was shoulder-deep, slamming at something—a window frame, shattered mullions and teeth of glass—when the cell in my right front pocket began to ring. It rang on and on, five times, six times, and I couldn’t stop myself, the motion of pitching forward and heaving back all I knew, the dirt looser now, fragments of shingle appearing at the bottom of the hole like treasure. The ringing stopped. Shingle gave way to splintered wood, chicken wire, and fragments of stucco, an interior wall—was that an interior wall? And then the cell began to ring again and I dropped the shovel, just for an instant, to pull the thing out of my pocket and shout into the receiver. “Yeah?” my voice boomed out, and all the while I was looking at the woman, at her hopeless eyes and bloodied hands, and there was the hillside poised above us like the face of death.

“It’s Joe Liebowitz. Where are you?”

“Who?”

“Dr. Liebowitz. At the hospital.”

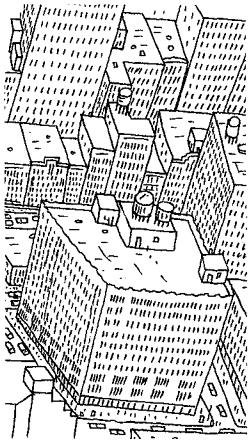
It took a moment, shifting gears. “Yeah,” I said. “I’m here.”

“Good. All right. Now, listen: we found somebody and he’s on his way to you, on a motorcycle, so we think—he thinks—he can get through, and all you have to do is hand the package over to him. Are you all right? You think you can do that?”

Yes, I was going to say, *of course I can do that*, but I didn’t have the chance. Because at that moment somebody—some guy in a blue windbreaker and a Dodgers cap gone black with the rain—made a grab for the shovel, and they’re saying I brandished the gun, but I don’t know, I truthfully don’t. What I do know is that I dropped the cell and wrestled the shovel away from him and began to dig with everything I had, and I could have been made of steel and rivets, a digging machine, a robot, all sensation fled out of my limbs and hands and back. I dug. And the woman—the wife, the young mother—collapsed in the mud, giving up her grief in a chain of long shuddering sobs that fed me like an intravenous drip, and people were gathering now to comfort her and some guy with a pick was starting in beside me. The cell rang again. It was right there, at my feet, and I paused only to snatch it up and jam it down the front of my pants, mud and all.

I don’t how long it was after that—five minutes maybe, no more—before I broke through. I was stabbing at the bottom of the hole like a fencer parrying an invisible opponent, thrusting away, when all at once the shovel plunged in all the way to my fist and everything went still.

This was the miracle: he was in there, the husband, and the little girl with him, preserved in a pocket where the refrigerator and stove had gone down under a section of the wall and held it in place. As soon as I jerked the blade of the shovel back his arm came thrusting out of the hole, and it was a shock to see this grasping hand and the arm so small and white and unexpected in that sea of mud. I could hear him now—he was shouting his wife's name, "*Julie! Julie!*"—and the arm vanished to show a sliver of his face, one eye so intensely green it was as if all the vegetation of the hillside had been distilled and concentrated there underground, and then his hand thrust out again and she was there, the wife, clinging to it.



I stood back then and let the guy with the pick work at the hole, the rain settling into a thin drizzle and a long funnel of cloud clinging to the raw earth above us as if the mountain had begun to breathe. People were crowding around all of a sudden, and there must have been a dozen or more, wet as rats, looking shell-shocked, the hair glued to their heads. Their voices ran away like kites blown on the wind. Somebody had a movie camera. And my cell was ringing, had been ringing for I don't know how long. It took me a minute to wipe the scrim of mud from the face of it, and then I pressed the talk button and held it to my ear.

"Gordon? Is this Gordon I'm talking to?"

"I'm here," I said.

"Where? Where are you, that's what I want to know. Because the man we got has been there for ten minutes now, looking for you. Don't you realize what's going on here? There's a woman's life at stake—"

"Yeah," I said, and I was already starting down the hill, my car up to the frame in mud and debris, the police there, lights revolving, somebody with a plow on the front of his pickup trying to make the smallest dent in the mudflow that stretched on as far as I could see. "Yeah, I'm on it."

The doctor's voice ran at me, hard as a knife. "You know that, don't you? You know how much longer that organ's got? Till it's not viable? You know what that means?"

He didn't want an answer. He was venting, that was all, hyped up on caffeine and frustrated and looking for somebody to take it out on. I said, "Yeah," very softly, more as an interjection than anything else, and then asked him who I was supposed to hand the package off to.

I could hear him breathing into the phone, ready to go off on another rant, but he managed to control himself long enough to say, "Altamirano. Freddie Altamirano. He's on a motorcycle and he says he's wearing a silver helmet."

Before I could answer I saw Freddie, legging his way through the mud, the Harley looking more like a dirt bike in the Motocross than a street machine. He gave me a thumbs-up sign and gestured to the trunk of my car even as I waded through the muck and dug in my pocket for the keys. I was soaked through to the skin. My back began to signal its displeasure and my arms felt as if all the bone and sinew had been cored out of them. Did I mention that I don't have much respect for Freddie Altamirano? That I don't like him? That he lives to steal my clients?

"Hey, brother," he said, treating me to a big wet phony grin, "where you been keeping? I been here like fifteen minutes and they are *pissed* up there at the hospital. Come on, come on," he urged as I worked through the muddy keys, and the grin was gone now.

It took maybe three minutes, no more, before Freddie had the cooler secured—minutes that were ticking down till the donor organ was just a piece of meat you could have laid out on the stainless-steel counter at the market—and then he was off, kicking up mud, the blast of his exhaust like the first salvo in a war of attrition. But I didn't care about any of that. I cared about the liver and where it was going. I cared about the woman who'd taken hold of my wrist and her husband and the little girl I never did get to lay eyes on. And though I was wet through and shivering and my car was stuck and my shoes ruined and my hands so blistered I couldn't make a fist with either one, I started back up the hill—and not, as you might think, to watch the lucky man emerge from the hole in the ground or to take a bow or anything like that, but just to see if anybody else needed digging out. ♦

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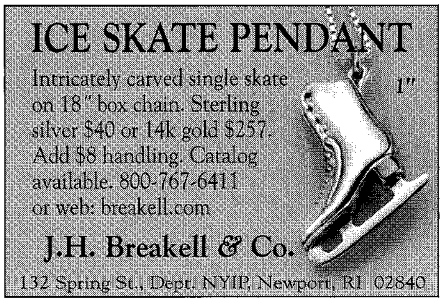

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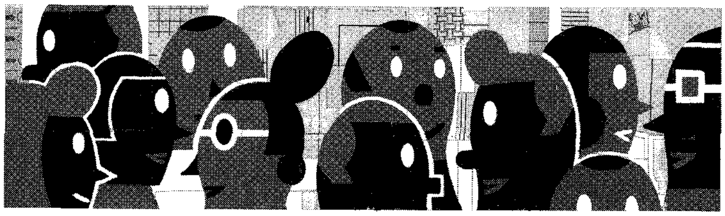


BOOKS

BEHIND THE MASK

On the minstrel circuit.

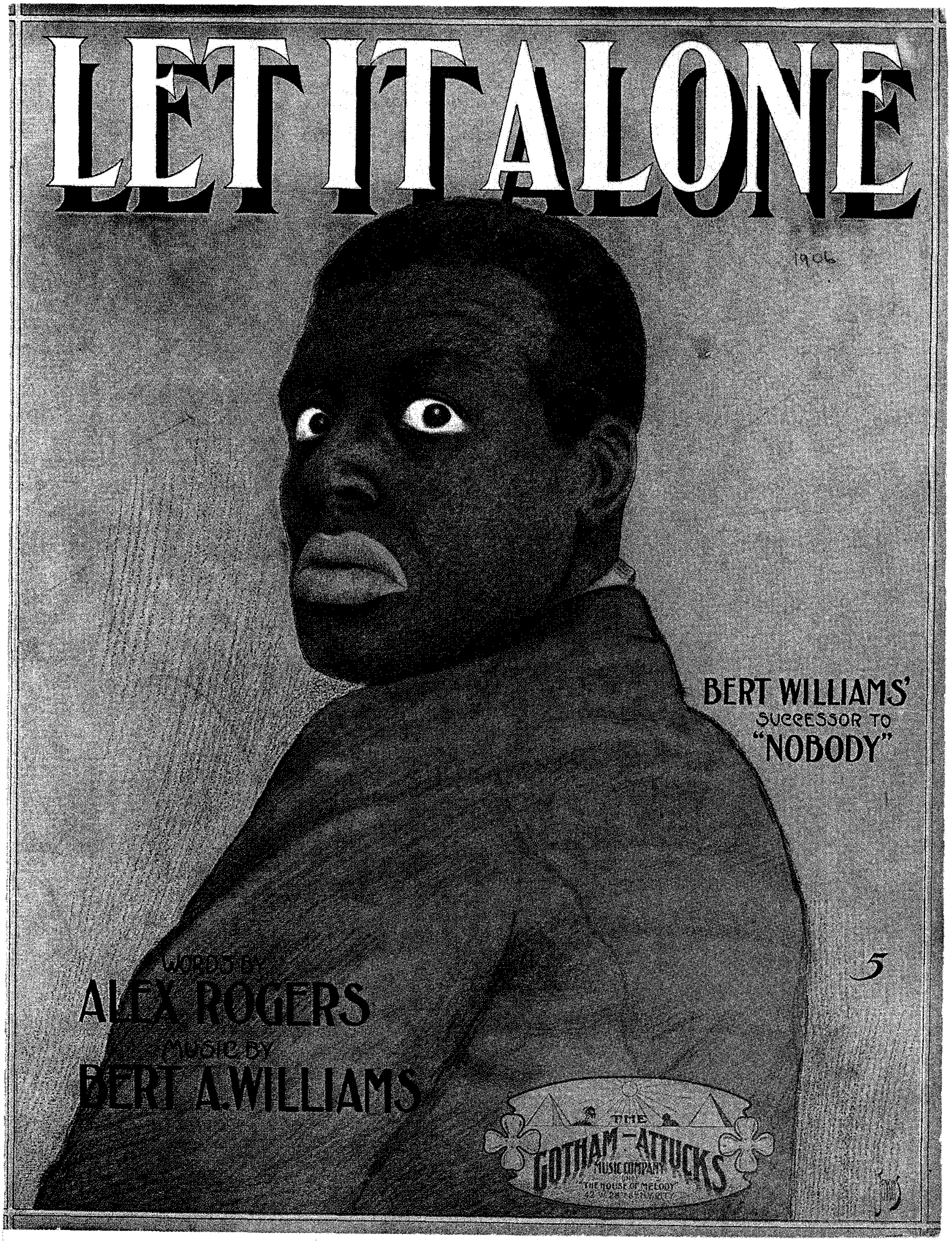
BY CLAUDIA ROTH PIERPONT

Backstage in a Detroit vaudeville house sometime in 1896, a mild-mannered West Indian gentleman named Egbert Williams dipped his hands into a supply of oily black burnt cork and rubbed it over his face until his features all but disappeared. These gestures marked the end of a private moral battle and the beginning of a great career. Williams and his partner, George Walker, had been knocking about the minstrel circuit for three years, playing medicine shows and hoochy-coochy joints and, most memorably, a rough Colorado mining camp where, accused of being better dressed than Negroes ought to be, they had been stripped of their clothes and were lucky to exit with their lives. Williams—tall, relatively fair-skinned, a child of the Bahamas—claimed that he learned about racism on such tours. Walker—small, very dark, and Kansas-born—already knew everything about it. During these years, Williams had carefully coached himself in "stage Negro" dialect ("To me," he later wrote, "it was just as much a foreign dialect as that of the Italian") and the shambling stage mannerisms that regularly accompanied it; there was no getting around audience expectations. But both partners seemed to agree that degradation had its limits: there would be no blackface makeup in their act. White minstrel performers used it; black minstrel performers used it; but Bert Williams and George Walker did not. Until the night in Detroit, that is, when, desperate for a permanent spot on the distinctly less deadly vaudeville circuit, Williams—the straight man of the team—blacked up. To his surprise, safe behind the obscene mask, he found himself suddenly free to play the clown, and the act got laughs as never before. He was no longer the straight man. And by the time the pair reached New York they were billing themselves as "The Two Real Coons."

Bert Williams, largely forgotten today, was the first African-American star: the most famous "colored man" in America during the early years of the twentieth century. The team of Williams and Walker put together the first all-Negro musical comedy to play a major Broadway theatre, in 1903—"In Dahomey," so successful that it was moved to London's West End, and gave a command performance at Buckingham Palace. Back at home, their popularity among audiences both black and white allowed them to force the integration of first-class theatres around the country. Williams, who went solo after Walker fell ill, in 1909, was a Ziegfeld Follies headliner—the only Negro member of the troupe, playing alongside Fanny Brice and Eddie Cantor—for nearly a decade. And through it all he continued to perform in blackface, embellished by giant lips painted over the cork, an ill-fitting suit, a preternaturally unhurried style of locomotion, and a cringing "Uh-huh, boss" lazy drawl. According to another Follies colleague, W. C. Fields, Williams onstage was the funniest man he ever saw, and offstage was the saddest.

Both Williams's reputation and the remaining record of his work—a number of scratchy vocal tracks, some suggestive photographs and reels of film—make one long to ask: What on earth was he thinking? How does a mind maintain its balance when professional pride is so bound up with personal shame? These are the questions that Caryl Phillips braves in his alternately fascinating and frustrating novel "Dancing in the Dark" (Knopf; $23.95), in which Bert Williams serves as a troubled and troubling hero, and a glittering assembly of New York's black performers, in the years before Harlem came into vogue, begin to grasp what they might do for American culture, and what America might do for them. Closely based on documented fact, Phillips's book intersperses excerpts from interviews, song lyrics, comedy routines, and newspaper columns with forays into purest speculation—the novelist's realm of psychology, romance, nightmare—in order to evoke the devastation wrought by the celebrated act that Phillips's hero calls "my own impersonation of a Negro."

Of course, it was not his own impersonation. The first travelling minstrels, who, even before the Civil War, made the songs and dances of Southern blacks into the nation's first home-grown entertainment craze, were white men playing to the curiosity of Northerners. The fact that imitation soon turned to exaggeration and then to grotesquerie, as minstrel shows became insidiously jaunty arguments in support of slavery and eventually of Jim Crow (the term itself derives from a minstrel character), was given a further grim twist when aspiring Negro performers took to mimicking the whites who were caricaturing them. "The Two Real Coons" was a billing meant to suggest Williams and Walker's superior authenticity over so many white "coon" acts, and it had the desired effect of bringing attention to their undeniable talents. If the only existing use for those talents was as equally ersatz "coons," the duo—who, success achieved, let the objectionable billing slip away—set out on a long-winding path toward something true. Their personal conflict about how to get there is the core of Phillips's book. For the outspoken Walker, the time had arrived "for the Negro to storm the American stage and stake his claim to a position of equality." (Walker died in 1911, long before any such claim could be staked.) For the fearful and introspective Williams, the only hope was to make the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Bert Williams was the most famous "colored man" in America in the early years of the twentieth century.

stereotypical "shuffling, dull-witted, clumsy, watermelon-eating Negro"—as Phillips mercilessly has it—into a human being sympathetic to an audience, if not to himself:

> The audience may think they are watching a powerless man but they are, in fact, watching art. We must understand how to make them feel safe, George. We must see the line. We cross that line, George, then who is going to pay to see us? They feel safe watching a supposedly powerless man playing an even more powerless thing. Williams and Walker have to respect this and simply strive to be the center of laughter, not the object of it. In time an alternative to the counterfeit colored culture that besmirches our stage will emerge, but only in time. Right now nobody will pay to see the colored man be himself.

It would have added immensely to the novel if we were, in fact, permitted to glimpse Williams's art, or to get some sense of the pleasure it must at times have given him. Despite the book's many references to the stage, Phillips confines the action almost entirely to the gloomy depths of his characters' minds—even the above argument is not spoken aloud—where little warmth of any kind appears to penetrate. Phillips, who was born in the West Indies and raised in Britain, seems somewhat inhibited in the face of the historic burden that these African-American artists had to bear. Although he has been prolific as a novelist and critic, and has often dealt with racially charged subjects, this is his first novel to take on America, and he brings to it much the same tightly wound control that he implies Bert Williams adopted to keep from exploding. It is hard to say how much of the book's restricted emotional tone is a result of Phillips's dramatic intent—as though to let go of suffering for a moment would be to discount it—and how much a result of his own attempt to keep from exploding over his hero's resignedly unheroic choices.

The novel is divided into acts, like a drama, with the principal players—Williams, Walker, Walker's unhappy wife, Aida, Williams's even unhappier wife, Lottie—repeatedly breaking in to speak from their distinctive points of view. Yet everyone sounds dryly reflective and dully indistinguishable until anger begins to surface, rather late, and the varied voices suddenly become as clear as what they have to say. Only anger—not regret, and certainly not sympathy—brings the book to life, as when Aida Walker lashes out at "this damn fool know-it-all West Indian, with his white heart, who deserted our colored stage just when we needed him most"; or when Williams's father bemoans how "the country has made a nigger of the boy"; or, above all, when George Walker cuts straight through his partner's chief defense: "It don't matter a damn how much you want to talk about what you do as art, I'm telling you, please cut that colored fool loose."

Williams may have attempted to cut the fool loose, three years after Walker's death, when he made a short film titled "Darktown Jubilee." The film does not survive, but accounts suggest that Williams took advantage of the newly intimate art form to make significant—and, to a white audience, extremely disturbing—changes in his act. Phillips, not alone among writers on Williams, takes the longed-for imaginative leap and assumes: no more blackface, no more rags. Instead, he has Williams wear (one may as well leap for the heights) a snappy zoot suit and a top hat. In a fictionalized news story about the film's première, Phillips elaborates: "Gone was the familiar 'darky humor' heavily laden with pathos, and in its place he gave to us an uncorked colored person of cunning and resourcefulness," who—and here Phillips accords with the history books—"caused a powerful outburst of resentment among the audience." To put the matter plainly: whatever Williams did or wore, white viewers reportedly caused a riot in the Brooklyn theatre where the film was shown.

Williams appeared in only two more short films before his death, in 1922: "Fish" and "A Natural Born Gambler," in both of which he performed in his usual blackface and essentially recapitulated his stage routines. Despite the films' enforced humiliations and clichés, Williams in the cinematic flesh displays a subtle pride, which in recent decades has come to be widely acknowledged and even, perhaps, wishfully exaggerated. Thomas Cripps, whose landmark 1977 volume "Slow Fade to Black: The Negro in American Film" remains the standard in the field, observes that the lolling farm boy Williams plays in "Fish" is evidently "itching to be his own man," while Williams's gambler is nothing less than a "leader of blacks," an "enemy of convention," and—this is a tribute, given the emasculated image that fearful whites had long imposed—"the 'bad nigger' for all who could

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see through his darkey makeup." For all who could see: here, of course, is the rub, and another way of saying that most people see only as much as their time and place allow. In the world that Phillips constructs, hardly anyone sees through the darky makeup; Williams in these films is admired for his fine portrayal of "a charming big child of arrested development" and for his "watermelon grin." Whatever Williams thought he was giving to an audience—there is, after all, no way of knowing—Phillips's bitter fiction reflects what it found.

During the early nineteen-twenties, some two decades after Williams and Walker first aspired to improve the lot of Negro entertainers, black song-and-dance teams were appearing under names like Dis 'n' Dat, Sleep 'n' Eat, and Brains and Feet. One talented performer who had been working the minstrel circuit since the age of fourteen adopted the name of a horse he had won some money on—or so he claimed—and called his duo Step and Fetch It. Whenever his partner failed to show up or management refused to pay them both, he took the full titular burden upon himself, eventually arriving at the solo billing "Stepin Fetchit, the World's Laziest Man." Although his story seems in many ways identical to that of Bert Williams—a West Indian background, a long and unprecedented stardom, continuous accusations of making "a mockery of upstanding Negro citizens"—Stepin Fetchit (his friends called him Step) was a very different, boldly assertive man. And Fetchit's first-ever biographers, Mel Watkins, in "Stepin Fetchit" (Pantheon; $26.95), and Champ Clark, in the horrendously titled "Shuffling to Ignominy" (iUniverse; $14.95), take a boldly positive attitude toward the actor whose name became a racial epithet and a virtual synonym for Uncle Tom. Watkins, the author of previous books on African-American comedy, writes a wide-ranging, somewhat academic cultural chronicle; Clark, a correspondent for *People*, provides a more bluntly anecdotal history. Both books are opinionated and absorbing, particularly in their attempts to explain how the actor's virtuoso indolence—Fetchit could convincingly fall asleep while standing up—was as much a political as a vaudeville act.

The anthropological notion of the wily "trickster" figure—like Prometheus, or Odysseus, or Huckleberry Finn—has long been a staple of African-American studies, useful in reclaiming the characters of the old slave tales (like Brer Rabbit) as symbols of sneaking rebellion, for whom the evasion of work was a significant victory, and the only one they were likely to achieve. The term has become as tiresomely overfamiliar as any other piece of current jargon, and Watkins employs it liberally, but his book reveals a stirring and indisputable heir to the tradition in the man born Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry—named, he claimed, for four American Presidents—in 1902, shortly after his Jamaican father and Bahamian mother disembarked in the wilds of Florida. Even in childhood, even in church, when the collection plate was passed around, he "would put ten cents in the plate," an acquaintance recalled, "and take out twenty cents change." Although a school dropout, Perry was so far from being illiterate that he supplemented his early income with a regular column for a leading black weekly, the Chicago *Defender;* he also published poetry, most notably on the death of a tuba player in Kansas City. If he later won fame as a semi-incoherent mumbler—and Fetchit insisted, once he'd become a star, that his published statements be rendered in dialect, to maintain the illusion—his justification belied the linguistic pose: "Sometimes those script writin' men come to me and say Ah ain't readin' their lines clear enough. Most of the time they ought to be glad Ah ain't."

He made his first movie in 1927, shortly before the release of "The Jazz Singer," in which Al Jolson gave the waning blackface tradition an unsettling new hold on the national psyche. During the early years of cinema, black characters had traditionally been played by corked-up whites, owing to fear of offending white Southern audiences, who ostensibly refused to countenance real Negroes on the screen. Nevertheless, by 1928 Fetchit—shuffling and dim, but cork-free—had a contract with Fox and was reputedly "the highest salaried colored actor since Bert Williams." This was only the beginning: the advent of sound promised a vast artistic emancipation, eagerly assured by an industry convinced that mellifluous Negro voices were suited to the new technol-

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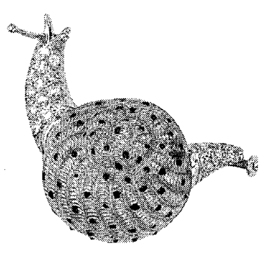

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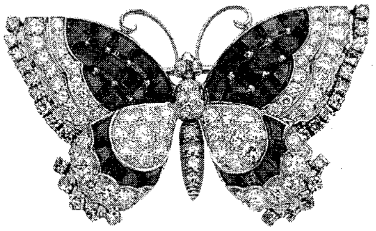

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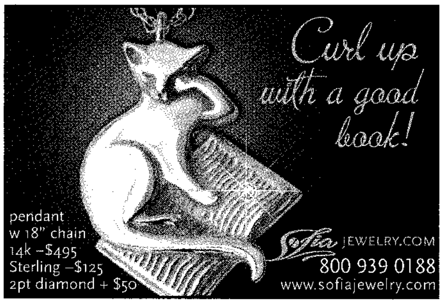

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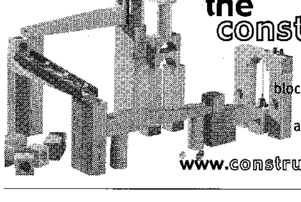

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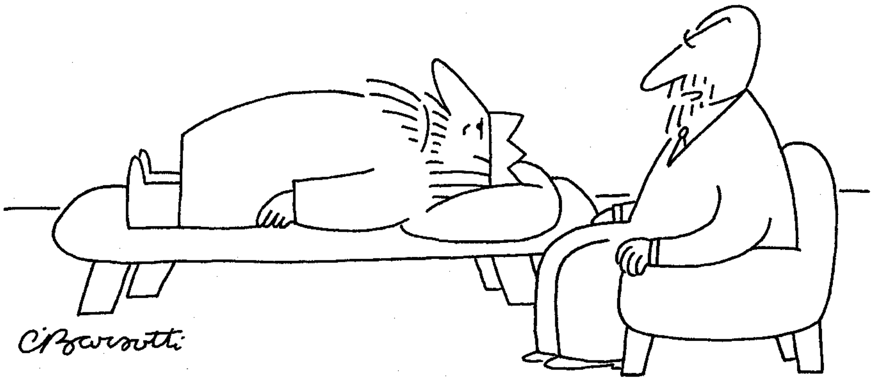

"Must 'More dungeons' always be the answer?"

• •

ogy—an industry willing, for a remarkable moment, to lead rather than follow the society it entertained. "The rich gift of music and of dance makes this race a boon to the singies and the talkies," *Motion Picture Classic* gushed. "A new race has come to the screen."

The breakthrough events were two all-Negro major-studio musicals, both set in the post-Civil War South, both released in 1929: King Vidor's majestic, nearly operatic "Hallelujah!"—Fetchit publicly scolded the director for overlooking black Hollywood talent, including himself—and Paul Sloane's critically lauded "Hearts in Dixie," in which Fetchit, as a sublimely shiftless ne'er-do-well named Gummy, danced with a light-footed grace that gave the knowing, twinkle-eyed lie to the physical "miseries" that saved him from working in the fields like everybody else. Of course, no one who put in a hard day's work could dance like that for long. Gummy's ruse, as Watkins notes, had a proud history in the way slaves sometimes feigned illness to avoid backbreaking labor; there was thus a cool logic and a covert defiance behind Fetchit's characteristic sloth. There is no sign, however, that Fetchit ever made this connection. His personal breakthrough came in a scene where, following the death of Gummy's wife, he briefly extended his range to stunned and tearful sorrow. Despite such humanizing moments, "Hearts in Dixie" was hopelessly embarrassing even in its time—black leaders made their objections known—and is virtually unavailable today. Most readers will have to take on faith Robert Benchley's contemporary view that Fetchit, making full use of rare opportunities, proved himself "the finest actor that the talking movies have produced," and—in the age of Chaplin and Keaton—"one of the great comedians of the screen."

All hope for a black Hollywood Renaissance crashed with the stock market, later that year; these two films were both its beginning and its end. Fetchit's career soon appeared to have ended, too: either because he courageously fought the studios' more debasing demands or because his personal behavior had become intolerable. The Negro press took opposing sides on whether Fetchit was a heroic crusader or simply out of control, and his biographers offer ample evidence that both were right. In 1930, it was reported that Fetchit planned to produce his own screenplay, "The Dancing Fool," which would "expel the cotton scenes" and "bring out the modern Negro"; with the movies he was actually filming, however, he was continuously late to the set or outright missing, in a wreck or in a brawl. He did not take his success lightly: he drove around town in a pink Rolls-Royce with his name in neon on the back; he married a seventeen-year-old chorus girl, and was promptly sued by another seventeen-year-old for breach of promise; a valet reportedly delivered his requisite raggedy costume on a gold hanger. And why shouldn't the buffoon that he was forced to play in seeming perpetuity—"The Dancing Fool" never saw the light—be countered, as Watkins writes, by the first black movie star's "wealth, flamboyance and outspoken sense of entitlement"? Fetchit's fantastic self-assertion could not have been wholly bad for black audiences to read about when they got home from the movies. For Fetchit himself, it might be considered a just reaction to watching a revolution die.

After a few years of exile in vaudeville, Fetchit returned to Hollywood a humbled man. His new roles included a servant subjected to the screaming racial abuse of Lionel Barrymore, a snivelling sidekick in a John Ford movie, and a butt of amiably insulting jokes for Will Rogers—and all the while he was becoming ever more absurdly stylized, his high, whimpering speech nearly vaporizing into the musical spheres. In 1939, the *Times* film critic compared him to James Joyce: "It is now almost impossible to form any idea of what he is trying to say." Fetchit's biographers defend his acceptance of such roles: he had no choice, after all, if he wanted work; even Duke Ellington appeared in 1930 in an Amos 'n' Andy feature. More, both writers manage to detect a nearly hidden (if differing) note of insurgency in the way he played them. Watkins writes of "a surreal obtuseness which so insistently ignored the slights that they were not only deflected but trivialized"; Clark sees the actor's soul concealed in his half-closed eyes, manifesting a "secret and separate self." Both may be right in claiming that Fetchit's loyal black audience saw such things quite clearly, and recognized a parody of their own methods of survival. There is hardly any other way of explaining why they bought their tickets—except, perhaps, to enjoy the way that the Negro dupe inevitably stole the show.

The N.A.A.C.P. failed to notice any radical qualities in Fetchit's performances. By the early nineteen-forties, its head, Walter White, had launched a campaign to rid the screen of all "subservient, dim-witted, craven, eye-rolling" Negro caricatures, who, in being taken for truth by a white audience, were "doing infinite harm." Stepin Fetchit was far from the only offender. Mantan Moreland, Hattie McDaniel, and many other actors trapped in domestic roles felt that their livelihoods were being threatened, particularly when studio moguls—eager, during the war, to appear to honor the claims of democracy—agreed, in March, 1942, to enforce the N.A.A.C.P.'s demands. And it wasn't only Hollywood that was changing. In 1943, Fetchit volunteered to entertain a black Army unit (the Army was, of course, racially segregated), and was booed as soon as he stepped onstage. In spite of these signal developments, McDaniel and most of the others continued to play their standard roles throughout the forties. Only Stepin Fetchit—whom Walter White had mentioned by name—was unconditionally blackballed.

And yet, typifying the confusion about what Fetchit's character really meant, some of his broadest (and best) performances were in the independent all-black films that he made in the years when Hollywood would not touch him for fear of offending black audiences. His brief turns in "Miracle in Harlem" (1948) and "Richard's Reply" (1949) bear out all that he might have achieved in a better world. Fetchit is as delicately calibrated in his physical clowning as Chaplin or Keaton (if as unvarying in his persona as Mae West), and in the context of an all-black society, with other actors portraying shopkeepers and police detectives and well-bred daughters, he implicates no one by his antics except his unique self: a long and sinuous, dreamily unfocussed, narcoleptic moon-calf ("Right now, I'm 'a finish a little nap I started week befo' last"), a marvel of the human condition rather than of a merely racial one, who today seems a creature of the minstrel shows by way of Samuel Beckett.

Although the burgeoning civil-rights movement had effectively killed Fetchit's career, the strength that it generated among the black population eventually allowed him to be rediscovered. In 1965, the twenty-three-year-old Muhammad Ali announced that none other than Stepin Fetchit—drawing on a previously unsuspected expertise in boxing—was serving as his "secret strategist"; cynics referred to Fetchit as Ali's court jester, but the young champion offered him the respect of one great showman for another. Around the same time, a newly intense breed of black comedian, unafraid of the old stereotypes, came to view Fetchit as an invaluable ancestor. Dick Gregory claimed him as a childhood hero, citing—without recourse to hidden meanings or winking tricksters—the plain thrill of seeing a black man on the screen. "To me," he later said, being mad at

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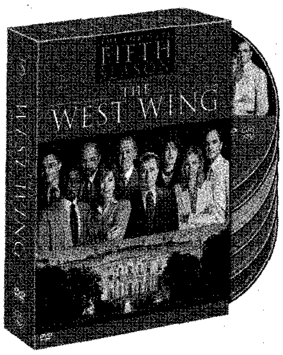

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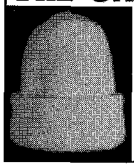

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Stepin Fetchit “was like being mad at Rosa Parks.” Flip Wilson, in the summer of 1968, asked Fetchit to take a major role in a sketch for a TV pilot, in which a respectable old Harlem junk-shop owner talked his son, an aspiring lawyer, out of leaving the neighborhood. The character was serious, smart, even political. “Right here is where we need a criminal lawyer,” he advised his son, played by Wilson, “because the worst crime around here is being black.” But, just when it seemed that Fetchit was being ushered into the new era, the door leading out of the past was slammed shut.

That same summer, CBS aired a nationwide television special, written by Andy Rooney, titled “Black History—Lost, Stolen or Strayed,” in which another up-and-coming young comic, Bill Cosby, reminded a new generation that Stepin Fetchit had popularized “the tradition of the lazy, stupid, crap-shooting, chicken-stealing idiot,” and that his character remained in the minds of those who had seen his films “as clear as an auto accident.” Fetchit’s deal with Flip Wilson was swiftly called off. As Wilson later explained the decision: “The tide had turned against him, and nobody wanted to take a chance.”

“Just because Charlie Chaplin played a tramp doesn’t make tramps out of all Englishmen,” Fetchit argued, “and because Dean Martin drinks that doesn’t make drunks out of all Italians.” But the burden for members of a vulnerable race is to be representative: to feel a sickening unease as members of the race are judged by powerful eyes, to fear that your jokes about each other will be used to twist the knife. Fetchit’s late years, mostly spent playing tawdry clubs, were a continual fight against this way of thinking, and his few victories were hardly less bitter than his losses. In 1976, he suffered a stroke while reading a newspaper article that, according to a friend, “blamed him for every black problem this side of slavery”; when, the same year, he was voted a Special Image Award by the Hollywood chapter of the N.A.A.C.P., he was too sick to attend. The current renewal of interest in both Bert Williams and Stepin Fetchit—the attempt to reclaim the individuality of these once oppressively representative figures—suggests a healthy or at least hopeful progress beyond extremes of racial vulnerability. Like the novels of Zadie Smith or the empire of Oprah Winfrey, these comparatively modest books about two comedians posit the existence of a post-racist world, if only in the shape of an audience to receive them.

And yet both Caryl Phillips and Mel Watkins, who are black, relate their interest in their respective subjects to a profound distaste for aspects of black popular culture today. (Champ Clark, who is white—and who was warned by Sidney Poitier, no less, that he would not be capable of writing about Fetchit, whose experiences Poitier says he himself “could not have endured”—steers clear of the territory.) Phillips has talked about “the rise of hip-hop and rap in their more vulgar, misogynistic, homophobic form” as an impetus for his novel, and about the disturbing qualities of “minstrelsy” among current performers. Watkins concludes his book by arguing that Stepin Fetchit’s public image was “not nearly as harmful, deleterious, and degrading as the images projected by many of today’s black comedians, rap artists, and even television sitcom stars,” despite the fact that these figures, unlike Fetchit, have had many other choices. And he notes that few cultural critics, with the famed exception of Bill Cosby—still campaigning against insulting stereotypes, but now accused of being out of date—have offered a word of protest. As the twenty-first century begins, it appears that the argument about who has the right to represent black America is far from over.

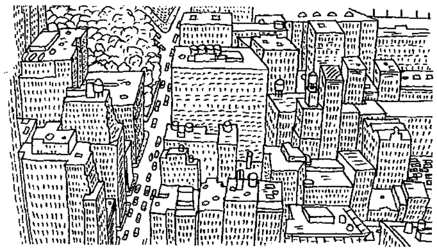
“You all have heard about dat straw what broke de camel’s back,” Bert Williams used to sing—this was his 1909 hit, “Believe Me”—“Well, a bubble added to my load would sholy make mine crack.” More than half a century later, Stepin Fetchit’s night-club routine showed what he had been learning from the brash civil-rights-era comics who had displaced him: “My wife and I were just voted the good-neighbor award—we even went out and burned our own cross.” The language of black humor had changed fundamentally; the experience had not. In an impossible time, these two funny men succeeded in turning tragedy—the usual prejudice, injustice, hate—into something painfully hilarious and widely beloved. How they did this, no book can explain. Looking back at the stark staring madness of so much of American history, it seems a miracle that anyone could laugh. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

For Kids

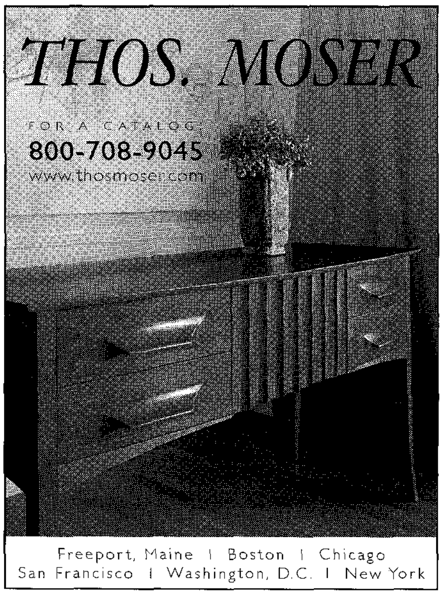
A Room with a Zoo, *by Jules Feiffer (Michael Di Capua; $16.95).* Julie, the nine-year-old narrator of this novel for children (whose father happens to be a cartoonist named Jules), has an urgent desire to own a Chihuahua. Instead, she winds up juggling a menagerie of substitutes—cats, hamsters, turtles, and the like—each with its own propensity for calamity. Not all the animals in this book survive. Julie's attempts to read her parents are richly nuanced—she knows to pay more attention to silences than to the things she's actually told. She also worries about how to love her reclusive, gangster-faced fish, works on her canine acquisition strategy, and gets caught up in some engaging slapstick. The cadences of Feiffer's writing are a pleasure to read aloud, and his pen-and-ink drawings propel the story by being simultaneously squirmy and lovely.

The Clouds Above, *by Jordan Crane (Fantagraphics; $18.95).* After heroically escaping his beastly teacher, Simon and his cat, Jack, enter a dream world that only a child unburdened by school could conjure. Like many great adventures, this one begins with a passageway—here a rickety staircase—to a universe situated just beyond the familiar. As Simon and Jack climb, they befriend a helpful cloud, battle heavy weather, trick a flock of belligerent birds, and question their own existence. Crane's drawings are clean, yet full of nuance; his writing is playful and sharp. The artistry is in the detail: Jack's movements are consistently catlike, and the teacher is a mangy figure surrounded by flies, an amalgam of the forces that oppose creativity and imagination.



The Bear and the People, *by Reiner Zimnik, translated from the German by Nina Ignatowicz (New York Review Children's Collection; $16.95).* Zimnik's emergence in the decade after the Second World War, his parallel careers as a writer and as a visual artist, and his birthplace in a region transferred from Germany to Poland after 1945 make it tempting to think of him as Günter Grass for kids. Certainly his works, behind fairy-tale surfaces, display a similar sense of unease. This tale of a dancing bear and his master, if not quite as mesmerizing as Zimnik's "The Crane," has much in common with it. Both involve a duo who set themselves up in isolation and whose dealings with society lead to extremes of celebrity and conflict. The bear and his master vanquish several enemies but are powerless against change, age, and the casual cruelties of ordinary folk.

The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature, *edited by Jack Zipes, Lissa Paul, Lynne Vallone, Peter Hunt, and Gillian Avery (Norton; $65).* Citing Johann Amos Comenius's "Orbis Sensualium Pictus," an illustrated encyclopedia and grammar from 1658, as the first commonly accepted work for children, Zipes and his colleagues give a tour of the following three and a half centuries in a colossal volume, nearly twenty-five hundred pages long. Occasionally, the scholarly tone conflicts with the fanciful subject matter ("The Very Hungry Caterpillar" is "a rudimentary game book" whose "very bright colors are characteristic of the period"). But the coverage is impressive, with examples that range from a single illustration to entire works. The anthology is divided into nineteen thematic sections—comics, books of instruction, verse—and includes both canonical stories like Oscar Wilde's "The Happy Prince" and such obscurities as versions of fairy tales preserved in nineteenth-century British chapbooks. Color plates convey the astonishing variety of visual art in books from Struwwelpeter onward, and are enough to make anyone feel a little nostalgic.



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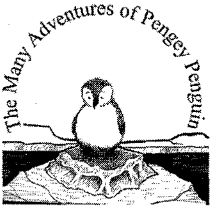

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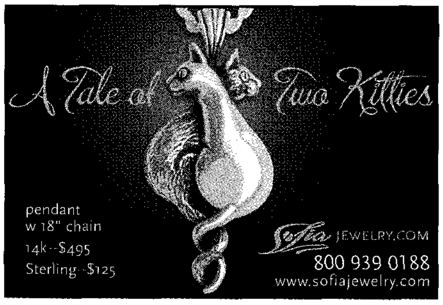

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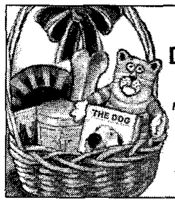

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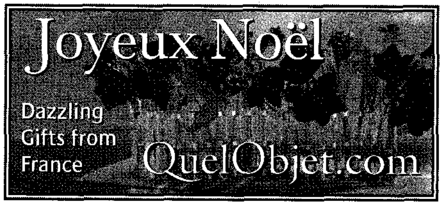

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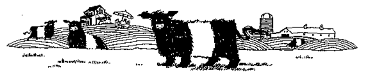

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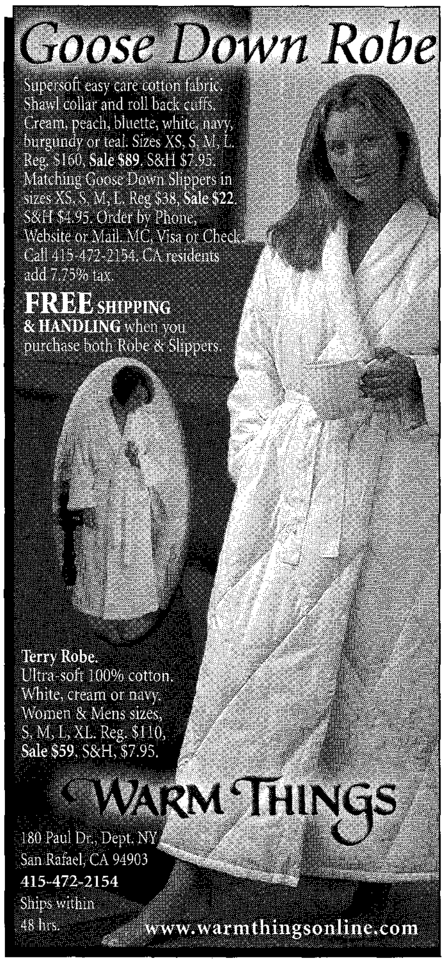
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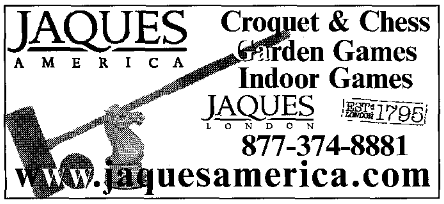
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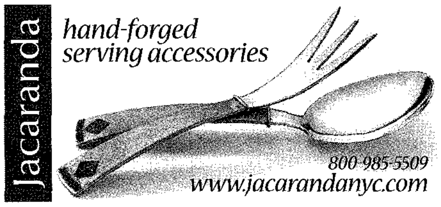
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ON TELEVISION

L.A. OUTLAWS

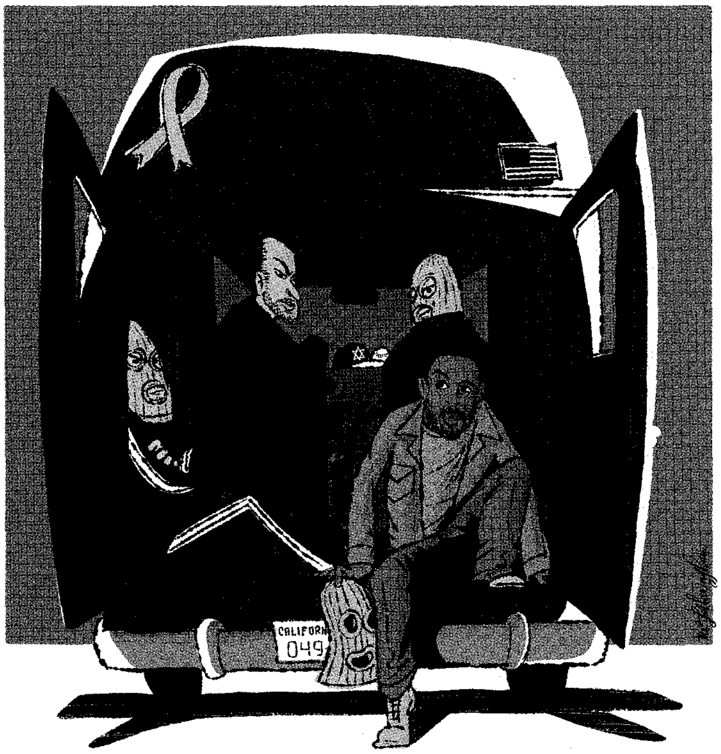
Showtime brings international terrorism home.

BY NANCY FRANKLIN

In the ten-hour Showtime miniseries "Sleeper Cell," which began on Sunday and will finish up on December 18th (with frequent reruns along the way), viewers will get to know five members of a Muslim terrorist cell in Los Angeles who are planning a large-scale attack on the city. The group is led by a darkly handsome authoritarian named Faris al-Farik (Oded Fehr), a Saudi (but maybe not . . .) whose cover is that he's a security expert named Yossi Amran, a devoted Jew who enjoys spending his spare time coaching a kids' baseball team called the Sinai Maccabees. The clutch of killers is a model of diversity: Ilija (Henri Lubatti) is a tightly wound, wiry Bosnian whose family was murdered by Serbs; Christian—heh heh—is a Frenchman (Alex Nesic), a "reformed" skinhead who has found the true path; Tommy (Blake Shields) is a blond, blue-eyed Koran scholar, the child of liberal Berkeley professors who neglected him ("You were always spending twenty-four hours a day leading protests, seminars, sit-ins," he complains to his mother), and whom he is repaying by helping to overthrow the United States government, or, as Farik calls it, "the U.S. Zionist occupational government." The most recent recruit is Darwyn Al-Hakim (Michael Ealy), a soft-spoken, devout African-American who, as the series begins, is about to be released from prison; his cover will be as a grocery-store clerk.

Farik has his reasons for assembling this group, one of which is that all of the members have military experience, so in addition to having specialized skills they're acquainted with the ideals of discipline and sacrifice—the better to be "ready to strike without warning, without pity." Darwyn, however, has a reason for joining up with Farik that none of the others share or know about: he is an undercover F.B.I. agent. We find this out halfway through the first episode, and from that point on Darwyn confronts wrenching, fateful choices every step of the way, as he must collude with the murderers in his effort to stop them. But he's such a stand-up character that the tension in his balancing act isn't what it should be; the wire he's walking is not all that high. The danger to his life, on the other hand, *is* high, especially after he gets romantically involved with a woman he meets at a birthday picnic for the six-year-old daughter of one of the terrorists. Gayle (Melissa Sagemiller) is the single mother of a little boy; mother and son, almost incredibly, take an instant shine to Darwyn. Darwyn is low-key to the point of near-invisibility; if he weren't the main character in "Sleeper Cell," you wouldn't even notice him. Compounding this is the fact that Gayle is an underwritten nonentity; throughout the series—and she isn't in a single scene that you don't see coming—she and Darwyn have a relationship that never really gets off the ground and yet is treated as though it were monumentally important in Darwyn's emotional life, not that he truly seems to have one. Gayle's little boy (Jake Soldera) is as cute as a button, a bunny rabbit, and a puppy combined—he sells the part so well that he could be in a cereal commercial. But it's a cereal you don't want to eat.

"Sleeper Cell" will probably remind viewers of some other shows—among them the TNT miniseries "The Grid," from last year; "24"; "Alias"; and even "The Sopranos." (Movies, too: "Traffic," and, in one or two moments of wildly absurd humorous exchanges, "Pulp Fiction.") Tommy works at a bowling alley, and after the team has met there several times he says, "If this is going to be our regular hideout, we need to get TiVo." You can hear Paulie or Silvio saying those exact words in the back room at Tony Soprano's strip club. Such clubs also pop up in "Sleeper Cell," as do prostitutes, and a few of the terrorists, including high-level associates of Farik's, patronize them, echoing the same flexible and hypocritical definition of sin that was embraced by the terrorists of September 11th. There's a little of "The Shield" in the series as well, in the seat-of-the-pants scene changes, accompanied by jarring music or hip-hop, and in the setting, the unglamorous parts of Los Angeles. (Unlike "The Shield," which is insistently down and dirty in what it depicts, however, "Sleeper Cell" tries to make the city "stand" for something, by showing frequent shots of the sun rising and setting on the skyscrapers of downtown L.A. Unfortunately, it's a skyline that, no matter how many times it's thrown up on the screen, refuses to become iconic.) Still, while most of the other TV series and movies about terrorism since September 11th have been keen to illustrate its global reach, in "Sleeper Cell" the international terror web is more talked about than shown. Characters from Yemen or Afghanistan pass through the story, but except for a few brief scenes we stay very much in our own back yard. We don't even see much of Washington. This series isn't about procedures and protocols, or even failures, at the highest levels; it's more focussed on the impossibly difficult day-to-day job of preventing disasters, without getting killed in the process.



Michael Ealy as an undercover F.B.I. agent in "Sleeper Cell."

The creators of "Sleeper Cell," Ethan Reiff and Cyrus Voris, set about to provide a "realistic" picture of how terrorists plan an attack, and to give underinformed viewers some grasp of the nuances of Islam and of its internecine struggles. A Yemeni sheik who comes to talk at a mosque in Los Angeles is targeted for assassination because he believes that the greatest jihad is not the one you wage with others but the one you wage with yourself. He's seen as a threat to recruitment, and he does cause Christian to question himself momentarily before returning to his murderous senses once he realizes that Farik's been spying on him. (It's understood that Farik would kill Christian if he left the cell. Dying as a suicide bomber is glorious. Dying because you backed down from being one is not.) The big hook of the series, of course, is that a Muslim is an F.B.I. agent in the first place; in a "Frontline" interview two years ago, a former high-level agent named Gamal Abdel-Hafiz, who claims to have been the first Muslim agent ever hired by the F.B.I. when he started working there in the nineteen-nineties, said that by 2003 there were still only a handful of Muslim agents at the bureau. But Darwyn's religion isn't actually an issue in "Sleeper Cell"—it's just a convenient way for Reiff and Voris to establish that not all Muslims are bad. (Darwyn's race is even less of an issue.) The conflict in the show has much more to do with a common law-enforcement quandary: do you stop the terrorists the second you catch them doing anything illegal, or do you watch and wait and gather intelligence in the hope of being able to break up an entire network? Darwyn argues for the latter approach, even though the longer he's with the cell the more he's compromised as a human being—if in fact it's possible to be more compromised than he already is by the end of the first episode, when he has to participate in a brutal murder, albeit in a way that, under the circumstances, could be seen as relatively humane.

Despite the mostly awful dialogue, "Sleeper Cell" succeeds on the strength of its plot. (There is one major casting blooper. In wanting to have a stereotypically innocent-looking actor play Tommy, the producers went too far and picked a dead ringer for Andy Richter, thereby introducing some unintended comedy into the show. Much of what Tommy does is stupid, but it's not meant to be funny stupid.) You're kept in a constant state of suspense as you watch various aspects of the plan taking shape—you know that, whatever it is, it's big, but its outlines are unclear until well along in the series. What's really scary about the show, though, isn't what you think will or won't happen at the end; it's the idea that anyone who has terrorist inclinations might be watching—it looks *way* too easy to learn how to commit mass murder. That's nothing new; it's famously possible, so they say, to build a bomb with instructions available on the Internet. Still, the kind of ingenuity on display in "Sleeper Cell" is impressive; you want to tip your hat to it, and, at the same time, you want to grab your hat and run. But where to? The cell members hide in plain sight; they use PayPal to transfer drug money, and they pick up their packages at Mail Boxes Etc. They even find a novel way to collect information about wind speed and dispersal rates—by watching children have fun. Let's just say that you won't look at a child blowing soap bubbles again without wondering if you should call the F.B.I. ♦

CONSTABULARY NOTES FROM ALL OVER

From the Falmouth (Mass.) Enterprise.

Falmouth police were looking for a man last weekend reported to have been riding a bike on the Shining Sea Bikeway wearing only fish net stockings.

Police received the call from someone near the bus depot on Depot Avenue around 9:14 AM on Sunday about the scantily clad bike rider.

Police searched the area on all-terrain vehicles, but were not able to find the man. There was no word if the rider was wearing a helmet.

DANCING

LONERS

What it takes to go solo.

BY JOAN ACOCELLA

Sally Silvers got her start in the nineteen-eighties, but she was never afflicted with the postmodern concerns of that decade: the irony, the obsession with style. Always, she has been a straight-out modernist—an abstractionist, a collagist—and apparently this had to do, in part, with politics. Early in her career, when she was given to contributing essays to arts journals, she wrote that she saw modernism as a way “‘to willfully not remember’ the way things are; to not have to exist in relationship to authority, to make a new position . . . not limited to symbols of lack.” Some of her dances have been overtly political. One was about America’s relationship with Nicaragua; another, about proletarian revolutions. But I don’t think it was liberationist politics that made Silvers one of the most beloved of downtown choreographers. It was the transfer that she made from politics to the body.

In 1977, right out of college, Silvers moved to New York to become a dancer, but no company wanted her. “I was too odd,” she told the *Times*. So she decided to go it on her own: not join a company, not start a company, but just assemble pickup groups when she wanted to put on a concert. To support her life and art, she got a day job. For twenty-four years, she has been employed by the Labor Institute, an organization that provides unions with information on health and safety. She is truly an independent artist.

Today, people are still calling Silvers odd. If not “odd,” then “quirky” or “eccentric.” These words are accurate to some degree. Her costumes are certainly weird enough. In one piece, she appeared in a beat-up pink party dress; in another, she wore a circle skirt made of bubble wrap. Her sets come from the same part of her brain. In her twenty-fifth anniversary show, which played last month at P.S. 122, the first dance, “Wearable”—a trio for Silvers and two of her longtime collaborators, Pooh Kaye and Cydney Wilkes—featured a huge glob of crumpled paper hanging from the flies. Kaye grabbed a handful of the paper and rode it like a pony. Wilkes took another handful and made a fort of it, and hid inside. Silvers wrapped herself in the paper and spooked around, like a visitor to your door on Halloween. Silvers’s music is more sophisticated. Often, it is a sound-mix by the poet Bruce Andrews, her companion in life and art. These scores, if bewildering—a beep here, a crash there, then a line of verse—at least don’t seem as though they were made by a third grader.

The crucial “eccentricity,” however, is in the movement. In a 1985 article, Silvers described a combination she had made up: “On all fours, lift one arm and the opposite leg, swing leg through to land in crab position, one arm and leg still up. . . . Legs tucked to back, mermaidish jump to land with legs spread.” Try that, and you’ll get some sense of what Silvers’s dancing is like. It is executed, furthermore, with a blithe unselfconsciousness, as if she were a happy little animal, or perhaps a harmless lunatic, going about her business. She knows exactly what she’s doing, though. In that same essay, she said that her aim was to “unknow” the body: “Nothing leads—the body parts become equal. . . . Force the point of awkwardness.” This is the choreographic equivalent of her refusal to remember “the way things are.” The way things are in dance, as in the rest of the world, is that there is a line of command. Feet follow thighs, head obeys shoulders, and the result is a readable, familiar story. Silvers doesn’t want to tell that story. She regards it as unfair, or boring.

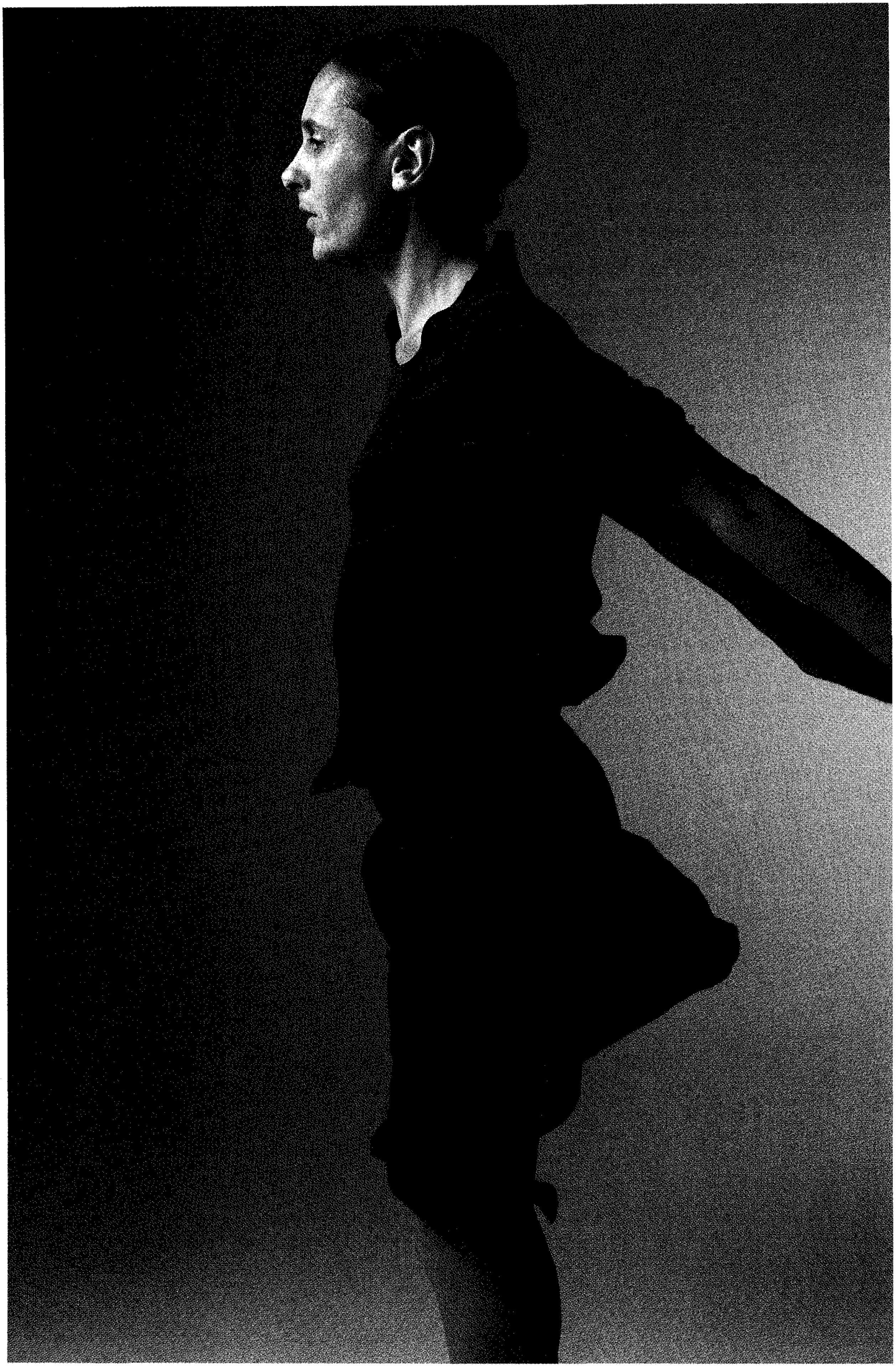
But I think that the eccentricity of Silvers’s movement has been too much emphasized, or the stress is always on what she has done without (virtuosity, legibility), as opposed to what she has achieved. Some reviewers, trying, it seems, just to explain why they like her so much, have said that the movement is childlike, and has a note of vulnerability. But this, too, is wrong. It makes her sound sweet, whereas she is actually tough and wise.

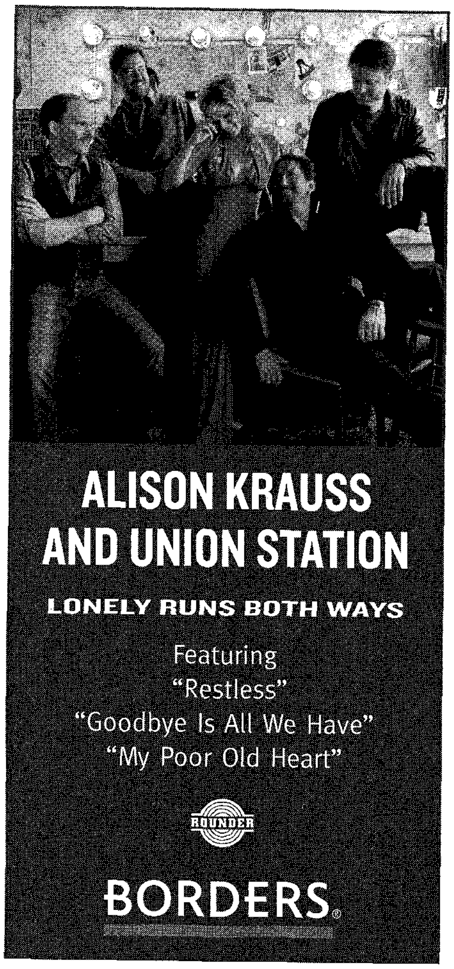
Most of Silvers’s concerts, if they are not totally one-woman productions, contain a solo for her, and the recent show was no exception. Its final piece was a new solo, the well-named “Oven Rack,” where she cooked her method one more time. Again she appeared in a bizarre outfit, an indescribable thing of faux-luxury fabrics, red and midnight blue. In keeping with that cross between hip and heartfelt, she danced to a tape collage of Iris DeMent singing country-and-Western songs, and often acted out the lyrics. When DeMent sang, “My life, it’s tangled in wishes / and so many things that just never turned out right,” Silvers did a huge back bend—a big effort, to no clear end. When DeMent said the morning star shed its beams on her, Silvers doggedly walked the entire periphery of a circle of light on the stage. Elsewhere, she grabbed her foot in one hand and, with the other hand pointing urgently forward, hopped toward the wings. (You thought, How is she going to get out of this? Is she going to fall?) The effect, though witty, wasn’t satirical. It was a story about how hard things are. Unlike DeMent, and most modern dance, Silvers refuses to bleed in attractive ways, but she, too, is a confused person, in a tacky getup. Life itself, she seems to say, is tacky, but it’s still our life.

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker is a completely different item. She is Belgium’s foremost modern-dance choreographer, and those well-funded Europeans don’t go around in beat-up party dresses. Nor do they have much truck with old-left politics. They’ve seen socialism, and they are into something else: apocalypticism. De Keersmaeker’s 1984 “Elena’s Aria” featured fifty chairs and a promotional film from a wrecking company. God was dead, and De Keersmaeker, like many other European choreographers, was still pondering this problem.

Since her choreographic début, in

Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker’s piece “Once” is set to a Joan Baez concert album from 1963. Photograph by Max Vadukul.





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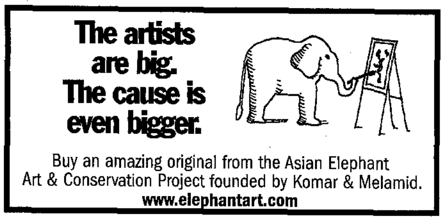

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1980, she has made a number of pieces in that vein, and some of them have been pretty tendentious, but they had a saving grace. Whatever Nietzschean thing was happening in De Keersmaeker's brain, her gut was that of a choreographer; almost always, there was some formally interesting dance to look at. This is not a matter to be taken for granted in European modern dance. (With Pina Bausch, for example, dance is the least of it.) It is an American preference, and De Keersmaeker may have picked it up in America. She studied at N.Y.U.'s Tisch School of the Arts in 1981. Since that time, her work has been a cross between the European (theme-heavy, emotionalist, I-can't-take-this-anymore) and the American (abstract, formalist, shut-up-and-dance).

And so it was with the 2002 solo "Once," which she brought to the Joyce last month. The piece is set to the record "Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2." This 1963 disk, De Keersmaeker told the press, meant a lot to her when she was growing up. What it means to her now, when she is forty-five and has two children and is the director of the resident dance company at Belgium's royal opera house, is the subject of "Once."

Baez's performance, with its "folk" virtuousness, seems naïve now. Still, De Keersmaeker treats it with respect, or mostly. The record is played in its entirety, and the words to the songs are projected onto the backdrop, lest we ignore them. De Keersmaeker butts into Baez's act—sings along with her, sometimes upstages her. (At one point, Baez says, "If nobody objects, I'm going to take off my shoes," and De Keersmaeker takes off her underpants.) Elsewhere, she uses the ballads as movement cues, and mimes the mockingbird, the dog named Rover, and so on. Her dancing has a dryness that, in contrast with Baez's warbling sincerity, hovers on the edge of subversion, but she never crosses the edge. And by the end she has found a truehearted stance of her own. Stripping off her dress, she stands there clad only in a pair of black underpants (she had a spare underneath) while the cavalry ride from "The Birth of a Nation" is projected onto her naked body. Meanwhile, Baez and then Bob Dylan, in an interpolation, sing "With God on Our Side." There's the apocalypticism. There, too, I would guess, is a criticism of the American intervention in Iraq. Is De Keersmaeker also criticizing Baez's belief that her birdsong could stop war? Yes and no. Again, she hovers.

"Once" looked like a structured improvisation, and at points it showed the let's-see-now ditherings so common in improvisation. But the piece was saved by De Keersmaeker's power as a soloist. Solo dancing is an art almost independent of dancing, and certainly independent of choreographic talent. Some first-rank choreographers (Martha Graham, Merce Cunningham, Mark Morris) have been great soloists, but others (George Balanchine, Frederick Ashton, Antony Tudor) were mere character dancers. No outward ability implies talent as a soloist; the gift comes from within. What is it? Generally, solo dancers have to be older and famous; otherwise people don't want to see just them, and nothing else, for seventy-five minutes ("Once"), or even eight minutes ("Oven Rack"). But age and fame do more than sell tickets; they also bestow authority, the belief that one can stand up there all alone—unsupported, unrelieved—and tell the audience something serious. De Keersmaeker has considerable technical skill. She can walk from here to Pittsburgh on half-point. She can balance forever, with one leg angled up in front, but this wouldn't mean a thing if she didn't fill that leg with a certain pressing energy, which becomes metaphoric power. The same with Silvers. She is less trained, but her intensity is even greater. As she grabs her foot with her hand and pogoes into the wings, she is telling you what, in her experience, is the meaning of life. Mikhail Baryshnikov, one of the most eloquent soloists of our time, once summed it up:

> When a dancer comes onstage, he is not just a blank slate that the choreographer has written on. Behind him he has all the decisions he has made in life. . . . Each time, he has chosen, and in what he is onstage you see the result of those choices. You are looking at the person he is, the person who, at this point, he cannot help but be. . . . Exceptional dancers, in my experience, are also exceptional people, people with an *attitude* toward life, a kind of quest, and an internal quality. They know who they are, and they show this to you, willingly.

That knowledge, and the power to make it register, is what sets Silvers and De Keersmaeker apart. ♦

THE THEATRE

ARTIFICIAL RESPIRATION

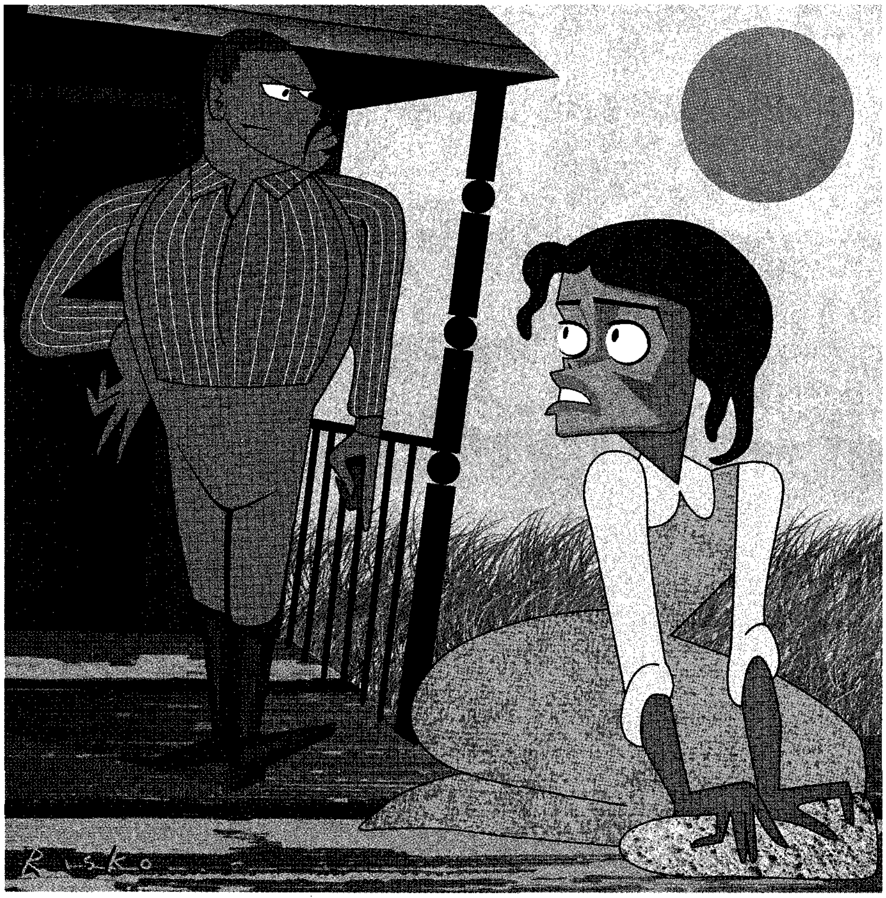
Accentuating the negative in "The Color Purple" and "Miss Witherspoon."

BY JOHN LAHR

In 1973, Alice Walker made a pilgrimage to Eatonville, Florida, to place a tombstone on the unmarked grave of the African-American writer and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. Walker's 1982 novel, "The Color Purple," has now been made into a musical (at the Broadway), and its abused, humiliated, and stifled heroine, Celie (the compelling LaChanze), embodies one of Hurston's trenchant observations: "People can be slave-ships in shoes." The opening image of the musical is perhaps its most resonant. Celie and her sister, Nettie, as children, sit in an ancient tree clapping their hands and chanting doggerel:

> Papa don't like no screamin' round here
> No lip from da woman when they chug dat beer.

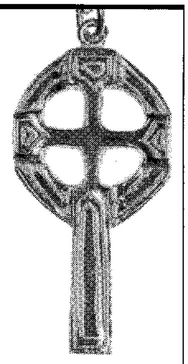
Silence is at issue in the girls' game and in their lives. In a heartbeat, Celie has lost her song. She is now fourteen, and her stepfather has just impregnated her for the second time. Both children are taken from her. By then, she has also lost her mother, her father, and is about to lose her sister; and when she's married off to the cruel Mister (Kingsley Leggs) for the price of a cow, for all intents and purposes she has lost her life. For most of the show, the homely Celie is a domestic drudge. Her husband calls her ugly; out of self-abasing dutifulness, she hides herself away. Because she has been systematically stripped of her identity, she cannot announce herself to the world. (The set designer, John Lee Beatty, hints at this by reproducing on the curtain one of Celie's letters to God, in which the words "I am" are crossed out. The letter continues, "Maybe you can give me a sign letting me know what is happening to me.") Celie's chronic and emblematic problem, in other words, revolves around what Hurston called "the muteness of slavery."



Kingsley Leggs and LaChanze as Mister and Celie in "The Color Purple."

Song is, naturally, crucial to every musical, but for the African-American story it's doubly important, linked as it is to the achievement of individuality through centuries of subjugation. To sing solo is to take a stand, to take up space in the world, to broadcast your identity, which is why the agent of liberation in Walker's story is a free-spirited blues singer named Shug Avery (the vivacious Elisabeth Withers-Mendes, making an impressive Broadway début). Shug knows her own desires and acts on them; she is a whole woman with a whole name. "Not like Nettie, not like Sofia/Not like nobody else up in here/Shug Avery," Celie sings. Shug is introduced to Celie's household by Mister, who has a jones for her, but she turns out to be Celie's Sapphic salvation instead. "You hush my mouth and still me/With a song I never heard," Shug sings to Celie. As one might expect of a product with Oprah Winfrey's imprimatur, at the finale the engines of positivity pump at full blast and the blessings of abundance rain down. Celie is reunited with her long-lost sister and children (Nettie has raised them in Africa, natch); she has money in the bank, love in her heart, and an identity to celebrate. "I'm gonna sing out / Sing out / I believe I have inside of me / Everything I need to live a bountiful life," she exults.

Overamplified, overheated, and overhyped, this noisy production is about presentation, not penetration. Beatty has designed some gorgeous backdrops—an ochre Southern field and a folkloric African village. Donald Byrd's choreography of the life of the church and of the field has its dashing moments. (When the focus shifts to Africa and the see-through bodices of dancing natives, however, it becomes sensationally inauthentic: Olympic gymnastics meets *National Geographic.*) Brian MacDevitt's lighting gives the show a beautiful lustre. Still, it seems to me that the production team hasn't thought deeply enough about



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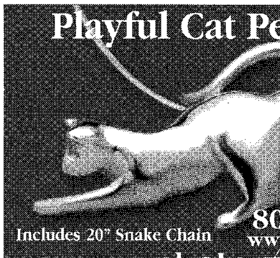

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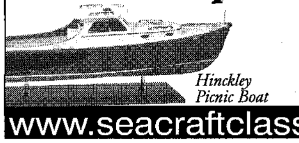

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what lies underneath their story; they don't appear to understand their own theme—or, at least, how to make more out of it than generic Broadway entertainment. Marsha Norman's libretto is a kind of color-me-purple comic-book outline: it gives us the externals of the plot but not, in any meaningful sense, the internal life of the characters, who function more as anecdotes than as dramatic influences on Celie. As a result, what is earned sentiment in the novel becomes mere sentimentality in the musical. Everything is as literal as a street sign, and sometimes not as interesting.

Under Gary Griffin's direction, the show moves at speed but picks up no momentum. It has pace but no rhythm. There's something inert at its core, which has to do with the lyrics and music by Brenda Russell, Allee Willis, and Stephen Bray, who have written pop songs but, as is all too evident, never assayed a Broadway show. Their songs illustrate, but don't advance, the plot. Except for their invention of a trio of town gossips, who form a delightful sort of syncopated chorus, they stay resolutely on the surface of things. In Shug's boffo number, "Push da Button," for instance, this is what they have to say about sex: "Gotta push it / If you wanna come in!" About love: "You and me/La la la/What about/What about / Love?" On the miraculous, they're positively prolix: "Like a blade of corn/ Like a honeybee/Like a waterfall/All a part of me."

"The Color Purple," which has almost ten million dollars in advance ticket sales, and the full attention of Ms. Winfrey, will be, I guess, a commercial success. The good news is that large numbers of African-Americans, who otherwise account for less than four per cent of the Broadway audience, are packing the show. The bad news is that "The Color Purple"'s rendition of the African-American world is banal and, even though God is invoked and beseeched throughout the evening, strangely soulless. At the finale, Celie sings, "Dear God, dear stars, dear trees, dear sky/dear peoples." To which I can only add, "Dear me."

If Celie is living proof that miracles happen, the eponymous heroine of Christopher Durang's latest existential capriccio, "Miss Witherspoon" (directed by Emily Mann, at Playwrights Horizons), is a vocal proponent of the negative. "I find it hard to get on the hope bandwagon," she tells us, adding, "I'm antidepressant-resistant." Played by the expert Kristine Nielsen, Miss Witherspoon rants at us mostly from the netherworld, where she can't seem to catch a karmic break: she is sent back to earth in various reincarnations as, among other things, a wife of Rex Harrison, a yapping dog, and the baby of toxic redneck drug addicts. Miss Witherspoon's willful sourness makes her a subject of scandal and concern even in the afterlife, where, she brightly admits, "I'm considered to have a bad attitude." She is fighting a losing battle with a sari-clad celestial swami called Maryamma (Mahira Kakkar). "Why can't I just be left alone to fester and brood in my bodiless spirit state?" she asks. "Who says spirits have to be clear and light and happy?" Miss Witherspoon doesn't believe in progress, change, redemption, or, well in life itself: every time she is reincarnated, she kills herself.

With this kind of comic conceit where anything can happen, but it happens to only one character, a certain monotony sets in, no matter how clever the storytelling. Durang, who is a funny man, postpones the inevitable with some goofy stage business. Chicken Little (Colleen Werthmann) makes a surprise appearance, and the sky—or, rather, pieces of the Skylab satellite—literally falls on her. And when Jesus Christ (Lynda Gravátt) eventually responds to Miss Witherspoon's pleas ("I demand the pearly gates, and St. Peter. And purgatory if I have to") and comes to see her, he is a black woman with a large floppy hat who wants Miss Witherspoon in her next life "to point out to people all the ways that they are not following me." When Jesus reminds her that it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to get into Heaven, Miss Witherspoon inquires, "Is there an income cutoff where that comes into effect?" Giddy with apocalyptic fear and loathing, Durang's play seems an augury that the fin has come early to this siècle. Still, there may be a ray of hope. "I want that Jewish heaven which is like general anaesthesia," Miss Witherspoon says. "I want to be put out like a light." I suggest a trip to "The Color Purple." ♦

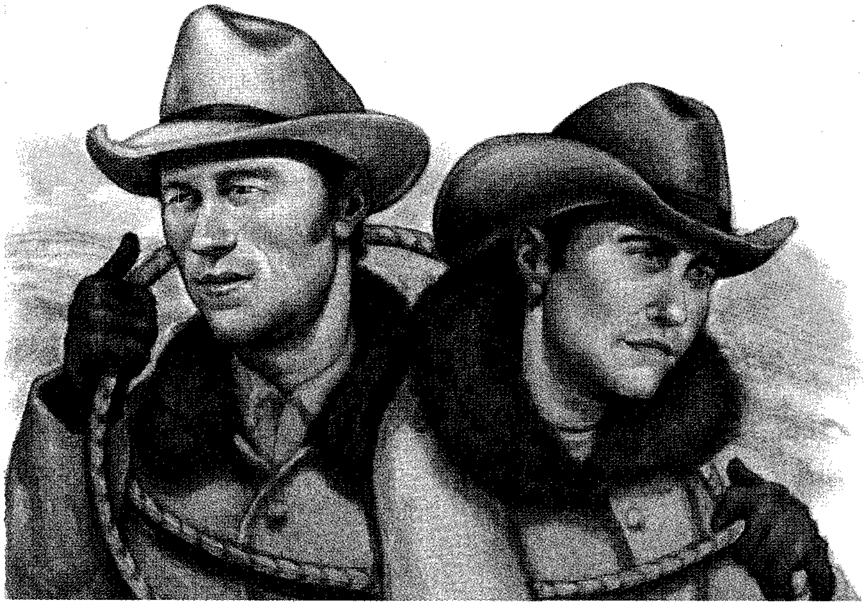
THE CURRENT CINEMA

NEW FRONTIERS

"Brokeback Mountain" and "The Chronicles of Narnia."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new Ang Lee film, "Brokeback Mountain," is a love story that tarts in 1963 and never ends. The first cene is a master class in the dusty and e taciturn, with gusts of wind doing all e talking. A cowboy stands against a all in Signal, Wyoming, his hat tipped own as if he were falling asleep. Anther fellow, barely more than a kid, urns up in a coughing old truck and oins the waiting game; both are in earch of a job. There is something ired and wary in their silence, and the ntire passage can be read not only as an cho of "Once Upon a Time in the Vest," whose opening hummed with a imilar suspense, but also as an unimagiable change of tune. Sergio Leone's en were waiting for a train; these boys re falling in love.



eath Ledger and Jake Gyllenhaal in Ang Lee's new movie.

At last, we learn their names: Ennis el Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist Jake Gyllenhaal). Both are hired for the ummer, to tend the flocks on Brokeack Mountain, and that is where we ollow them for the first, idyllic act of heir story. This is the most gorgeous part of the movie, and the least successful, partly because an idyll is less an event than a state of being. Lee wants to suggest the savoring of time, yet the camera tends to alight on ravishing formations of rock and cloud, grab them, and then move on, as if we were shuffling through a pile of photographs. (Does any director still have the patience to let our gaze rest without skittering upon the Western landscape?) On the other hand, you could argue that such transience sets the tone—at once wondrous and fleeting—for the rest of the movie, and that, if Ennis and Jack have fashioned a rough and rainy Eden for themselves, it is a paradise waiting to be lost.

One evening, a drunken Ennis shares Jack's tent, and, in the heat of a cold night, there is a breathy, wordless unbuckling of belts. Rumor had it that "Brokeback Mountain" was an explicit piece of work, and I was surprised by its tameness, although Lee's helplessly good taste, which has proved both a gift and a curb, was always going to lure him away from sweating limbs and toward the cou-

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pling of souls. Not once do our heroes mention the word love, nor does any shame or harshness attach to their desire. Indeed, what will vex some viewers is not the act of sodomy but the suggestion that Ennis and Jack are possessed of an innocence, a virginity of spirit, that the rest of society (which literally exists on a lower plane, below the mountain) will strive to violate and subdue. If the lovers hug their secret to themselves, that is because they fear for its survival:

> "This is a one-shot thing we got going on here."
> "Nobody's business but ours."
> "You know I ain't queer."
> "Me neither."

American Rousseauism, with its worship of open plains and its dread of civic constraint, is nothing new. The erotic strain of it that unfurls in "Brokeback Mountain" may seem unprecedented, although, considering that womanless men, bedecked in denim, rivets, and distressed leather, have been pitching camp in the wilderness since movies began, it doesn't take much of a nudge for the subtext to rise to the surface. There is little in Lee's film that would have rattled the spurs of Montgomery Clift in "Red River."

"Brokeback Mountain," which began as an Annie Proulx story in these pages, comes fully alive as the chance for happiness dies. Its beauty wells from its sorrow, because the love between Ennis and Jack is most credible not in the making but in the thwarting. Duty calls; they go their separate ways, get married—one in Texas, one in Wyoming—and raise children. Ennis weds Alma (Michelle Williams), while Jack's wife is a rodeo rider named Lureen (Anne Hathaway), whose knowing wink, from the saddle, is the most brazen come-on in the film. After four years, the two men—as they now are—hook up again, and from then on they meet when they can. The most crushing moment comes as Alma glances from the doorway and catches her husband kissing his friend, in a rage of need that she has never seen before. In their frustration, the men are spreading ripples of pain to others, and the others are women and children. The female of the species (think of Lee's previous heroines, like Joan Allen in "The Ice Storm" or Jennifer Connelly in "Hulk") suffers no less than the male, but she struggles to escape the suffering, whereas the mal swelters inside his strange cocoon That's why, when Jack and Ennis par at the end of the first summer, Enni slips into an alleyway, retches, an punches a wall—as if the only option for the unrequited, were to waylay one' own heart and beat it senseless.

In the end, this is Heath Ledger' picture. There is no mistaking Jake Gyllenhaal's finesse (look for the wonderfu scene in which he *can't* look—his jav tightening as Ennis, still just a friend strips to wash, just past the corner of hi eye), but it is Ledger who bears the yok of the movie's sadness. His voice is mumble and a rumble, not because he i dumb but because he hopes that, b swallowing his words, he can swallov his feelings, too. In his mixing of th rugged and the maladroit, he makes yo realize that "Brokeback Mountain" is n more a cowboy film than "The Last Picture Show." (Both screenplays wer written by Larry McMurtry, the earlie in collaboration with Peter Bogdanovich, this one with Diana Ossana.) Eacl is an elegy for tamped-down lives, witl an eye for vanishing brightness of whicl Jean Renoir would have approved, an you should get ready to crumple a "Brokeback Mountain"'s final shot Ennis alone in a trailer, looking at postcard of Brokeback Mountain an fingering the relics of his time there with a field of green corn visible, ye somehow unreachable, through th window. This slow and stoic movie hailed as a gay Western, feels neither ga nor especially Western: it is a study c love under siege. As Ennis says, "If yo can't fix it, Jack, you gotta stand it."

It was only a matter of time before major studio got its talons into C. S Lewis. The one thing delaying any attempt to film his Narnia novels was th lack of technology; until recently, for example, there was no computer-imagin program powerful enough to re-create wholly convincing wardrobe. That obstacle has now been surmounted, an "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lior the Witch, and the Wardrobe," is upoi us. The leap of the story is unchanged the Pevensie children, Peter (Williar Moseley), Susan (Anna Popplewell) Edmund (Skandar Keynes), and Lucy

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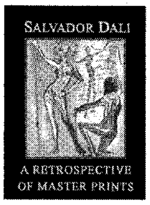

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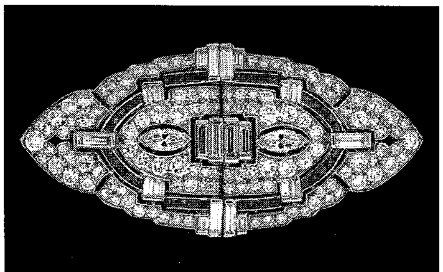

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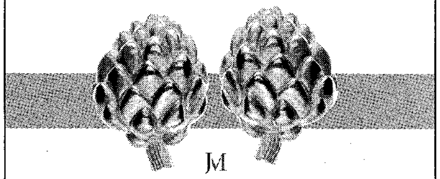

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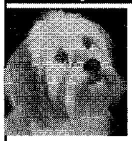

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ondon during the Blitz and dumped
n a pile of old chestnuts: the creaky
ountry house, the shrewish house-
eeper, the twinkling professor who
nows all.

And so to the conceit that, for de-
ades, has stirred both the souls of the
ithful and the loins of professional
reudians: first Lucy, then Edmund,
en all four children feel their way un-
ertainly through the folds of a deep,
rry passage and into another world.
Velcome to Narnia, temporarily under
e icy thumb of the White Witch
Tilda Swinton). Its true governor is a
on named Aslan (voiced by Liam Nee-
on), who has taken an extended vaca-
on, and who will not return, tan and
laxed, until the Pevensies show up.

There was much wrangling, ahead of
e film's release, about the spiritual in-
ntions of its director, Andrew Adam-
on—not a question that arose, really,
hen he delivered "Shrek 2." As every
arent knows, there is a large Christian
legory sitting bang in the middle of
ewis's tale, roughly as hard to spot as a
ino in a phone booth. Whether the
lm indulges or dishonors it, however,
beside the point; the problem with
ny allegorical plan, Christian or other-
ise, is not its ideological content but
e blockish threat that it poses to the
ow of a story. That is why the latter
alf of Adamson's film seizes up with a
ind of enforced pageantry, and why
ven the climactic fight between Peter's army of truth and the Witch's bevy of demons has an air of heraldic artifice, as if we were witnessing not a brawl to the death, red in tooth and claw, but an enamelled clash of ideas.

Lewis lovers must squabble among themselves. I cannot join the party, having missed out on Narnia as a child. I was busy elsewhere, up to my armpits in hobbits, and starting to ask hard questions about the sexual longevity of elves. When, as a grownup, I finally opened "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," it struck me as woefully thin soil, with none of the gnarled roots of lore and language on which Tolkien thrived. If the movie has to forgo Lewis's narrative tone, with its grimly Oxonian blend of the bluff and the twee ("And now we come to one of the nastiest things in this story"), that is fine by me. And, if there is Deep Magic, as Lewis called it, in his tale, it resides not in the springlike coming of Aslan but in the dreamlike, compacted poetry of Lewis's initial inspiration—the sight of a faun, in the snow, bearing parcels and an umbrella. That is kept mercifully intact in Adamson's movie, its potency enriched by the shy, unstrenuous rapport of his two best performers: Georgie Henley, as Lucy, and James McAvoy, as Mr. Tumnus the faun. The dark joke is that Mr. Tumnus invites Lucy to tea only because he must turn his guest over to the enemy. Thus does Lucy, over toast and honey, learn the lesson known to the heroine of every horror flick: Don't answer the faun. ◆

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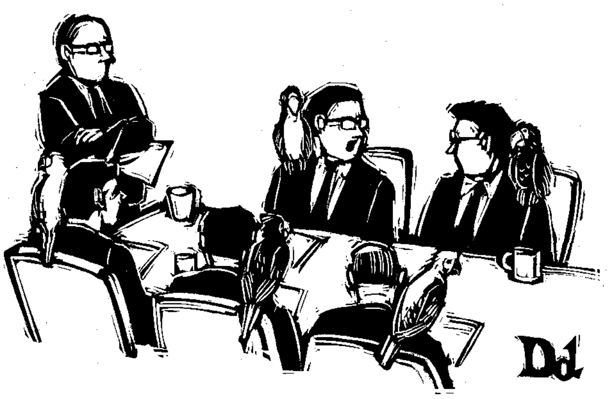
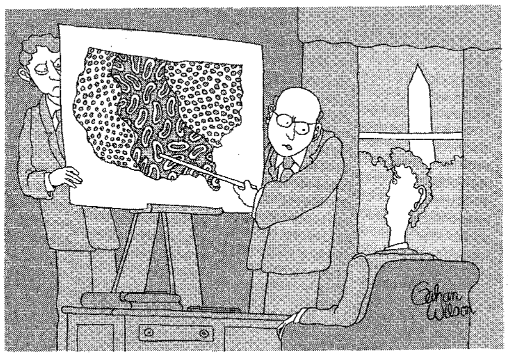
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote fo your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Danny Shanahan, must be received by Sunday, December 11th. Finalists in the November 28th contest appear below; go online to vote. We will announce the winner, along with the finalists i this week's contest, in the December 26th & January 2nd issue. The winner will be given a signed print of the cartoon. Any U.S. resident age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit www.newyorker.com/captioncontest.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Shut up, Bob, everyone knows your parrot's a clip-on."
Adam Szymkowicz, Shoreham, Vt.



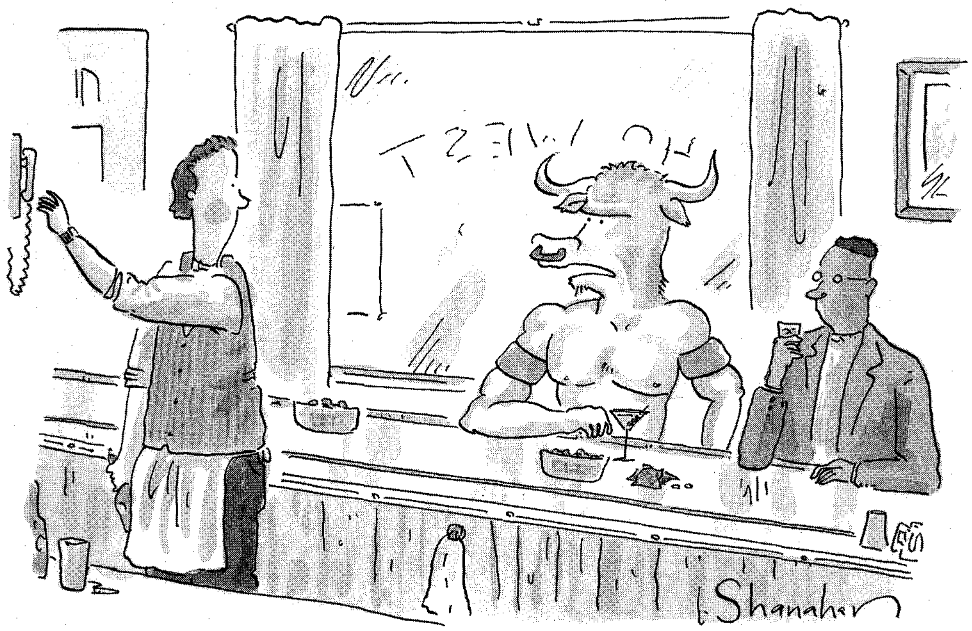
THE FINALISTS

"Stay with me, sir. It's almost recess."
Timothy Tanner, New York City

"And in this section it appears that you have not only alienated voters but actually infected them, too."
T. C. Doyle, Park City, Utah

"The inland tortellini are still with you, sir, but you're losing support with the coastal risottos."
Doug Metcalf, Tucson, Ariz.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



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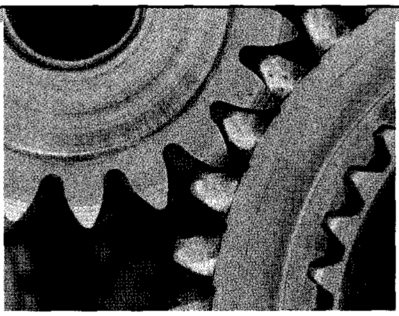

Lewis and Clark, rock and roll, MasterCard and data security.

From the two explorers who mapped America's West, to the scientific duo who described the structure of DNA, to your favorite rock group performing your favorite song, close collaboration can produce great results—whatever the field. At MasterCard, we've recognized for 40 years that maintaining the security of consumers' data and personal information also requires close collaboration, and we're dedicated to remaining industry leaders in this effort.

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Because MasterCard is accepted at nearly 23 million locations in more than 210 countries and territories, our cooperation with law enforcement must be both local and global. We work with law enforcement in the United States and abroad, helping to facilitate investigations and prosecutions of credit card fraud. Our own resources include a resident team of security experts, drawn from many of the world's top law enforcement agencies. We've even hosted fraud seminars for law enforcement employees, updating agents on payment card fraud trends and fraud detection techniques.

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Together we can help to combat ID theft and fraud, and prove once more what soccer teams, symphony orchestras, and happily married couples already know—the powerful results of collaboration.

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One in a series of essays addressing data security and other topics of interest to our customers. Learn more at www.mastercard.com

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